

November 2000 - Rs. 10



CHANDAMAMA



Children's
Special



TAMILNADU TOURISM - WHERE TIMELESS SPLENDOURS AWAIT!



You will also meet some great survivors!!

*T*his southern state has a way of rejuvenating your spirits....

Start off by a visit to Mudumalai sanctuary to behold some wild tuskers, keeping a reverential distance from the ferocious big cat. Simply marvel at some sleek, feathered songster at Vedanthangal sanctuary or grudge at the grace of a sambar deer at Anamalai.

Breath-taking artistry awaits you at the Mamallapuram shore temple, built in 7th century A.D. Move on to the mystifying paintings at Pudukotai, the archaeologist's delight.



Get tempted by the rustle of the luscious Kancheepuram silk against your skin-an edifice of silk weaving which goes back to 3rd century B.C. Allow revelations to dawn on you as you scrutinize the rock-art called 'Arjuna's Penance' or while sitting by the Kalamkari painter of Thanjavur. Resist yourself

from the 'Panchamukhavaadyam' (five-faced percussion instrument in

metal and hide) a rare instrument played at the Thanjavur temple.

Treat yourself into the intricacies of a simple hair ornament 'ladanaagam', brilliant and the pinnacle of sophistication. Envy the potter's fingers as the terracotta figure of a folk diety takes form, in Salem, the steel city of Tamilnadu.

As you cool your heels off at some tranquil hillstation like Ooty or Kodai you almost figure out- your soul has been satisfied! Maybe you can call it a kind of salvation, designed by the perfect partnership of nature and heritage....



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THE MOST
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GIFT**

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FOR YOUR
NEAR AND DEAR ONES
FAR AWAY



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MAGAZINE
IN THE LANGUAGE
OF THEIR CHOICE

ASSAMESE, BENGALI, ENGLISH, GUJARATI, HINDI, KANNADA,
MALAYALAM, MARATHI, ORIYA, SANSKRIT, TAMIL AND TELUGU

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OF THE HOME AWAY FROM HOME

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Answers to Discovery of India Quiz (October 2000)

1. a. Badarikashram, b. Srirangam, c. Sri Jagannath Puri,
d. Allahabad, the ancient Prayag, e. Near Badarikashram.
2. Madurai - goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswara.





Founded by

B. Nagi Reddi and Chakrapani

Some plain-speaking for The Children's Month

The month of November is dedicated to the children of India. What does that mean? Well, in this month, the people in general are expected to think about the welfare of the young, to find ways to make their life happy and purposeful.

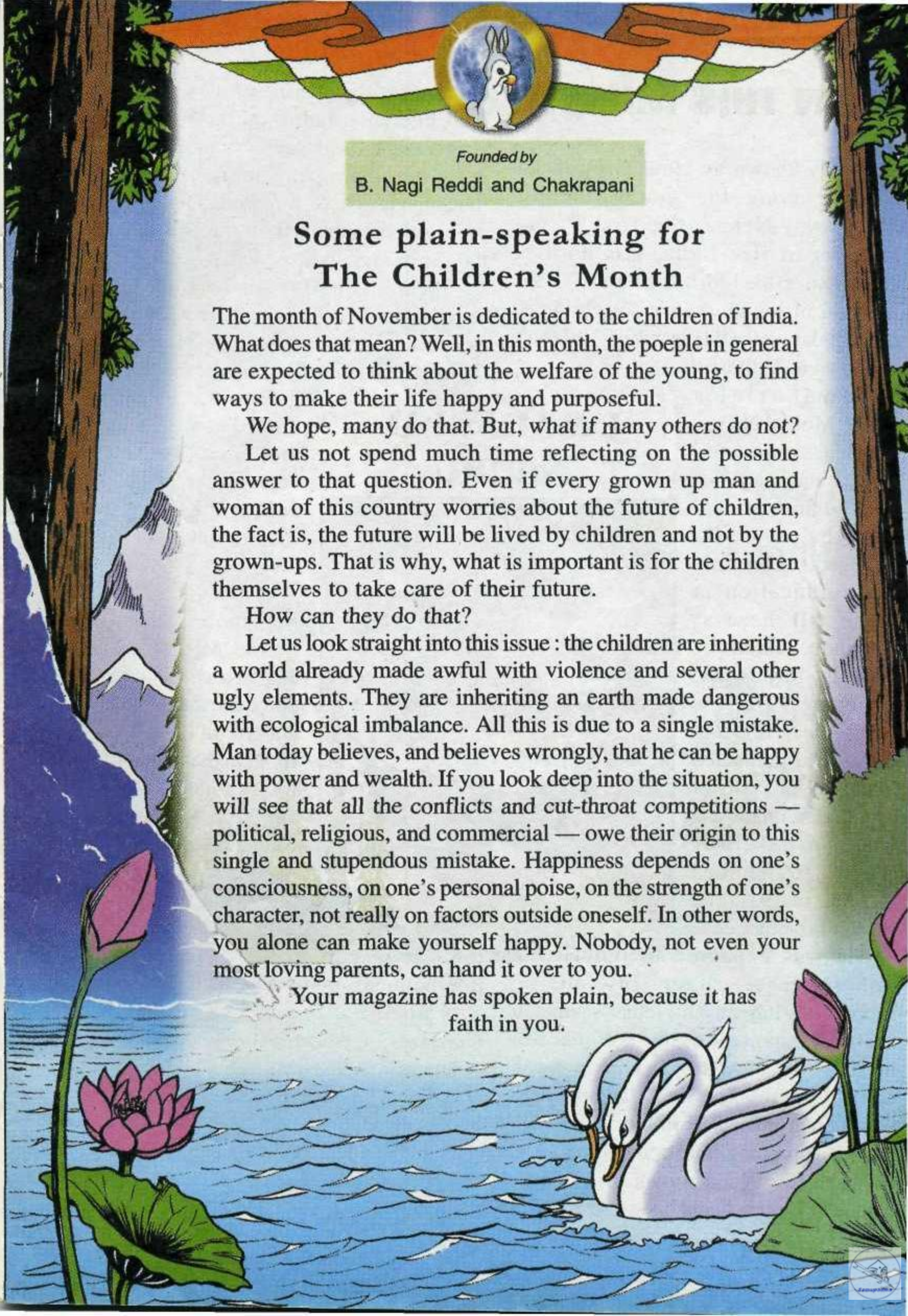
We hope, many do that. But, what if many others do not?

Let us not spend much time reflecting on the possible answer to that question. Even if every grown up man and woman of this country worries about the future of children, the fact is, the future will be lived by children and not by the grown-ups. That is why, what is important is for the children themselves to take care of their future.

How can they do that?

Let us look straight into this issue : the children are inheriting a world already made awful with violence and several other ugly elements. They are inheriting an earth made dangerous with ecological imbalance. All this is due to a single mistake. Man today believes, and believes wrongly, that he can be happy with power and wealth. If you look deep into the situation, you will see that all the conflicts and cut-throat competitions — political, religious, and commercial — owe their origin to this single and stupendous mistake. Happiness depends on one's consciousness, on one's personal poise, on the strength of one's character, not really on factors outside oneself. In other words, you alone can make yourself happy. Nobody, not even your most loving parents, can hand it over to you.

Your magazine has spoken plain, because it has faith in you.



BORN THIS MONTH

Popularly known as “Chacha” (uncle) Nehru among the young, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India, was born at Allahabad on the 14th of November 1889. Because of his great love for children, his birthday, since the year 1957, is being observed as Children’s Day.

Jawaharlal’s father, Motilal Nehru, was a renowned lawyer and leader of the Indian National Congress. He arranged for his only son’s education at home till he was fourteen. Then he sent the boy to the famous Harrow school near London. Jawaharlal graduated from the University of Cambridge, qualifying himself as a Barrister at Law. He returned to India in 1912 and started his practice.

He was expected to inherit his father’s legal career. Instead, he successfully inherited his father’s political zeal. An important event took place in his life in 1916. At the Lucknow session of the Congress, he met Gandhiji who cast a great influence on him.

Soon his plunge into politics was total. On April 13, 1913, a British army officer named O’Dyer ordered his soldiers to fire

on a peaceful gathering of men, women and children at Jallianwala Bagh near Amritsar, killing nearly four hundred people and injuring more than one thousand and five hundred. Jawaharlal grew determined to fight the British till their rule over India ended.

There was no looking back for him thereafter. He became the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress in 1928. Next year, he became

its President. Leading Civil Disobedience movements and courting arrest again and again, marked the next phase of his life.

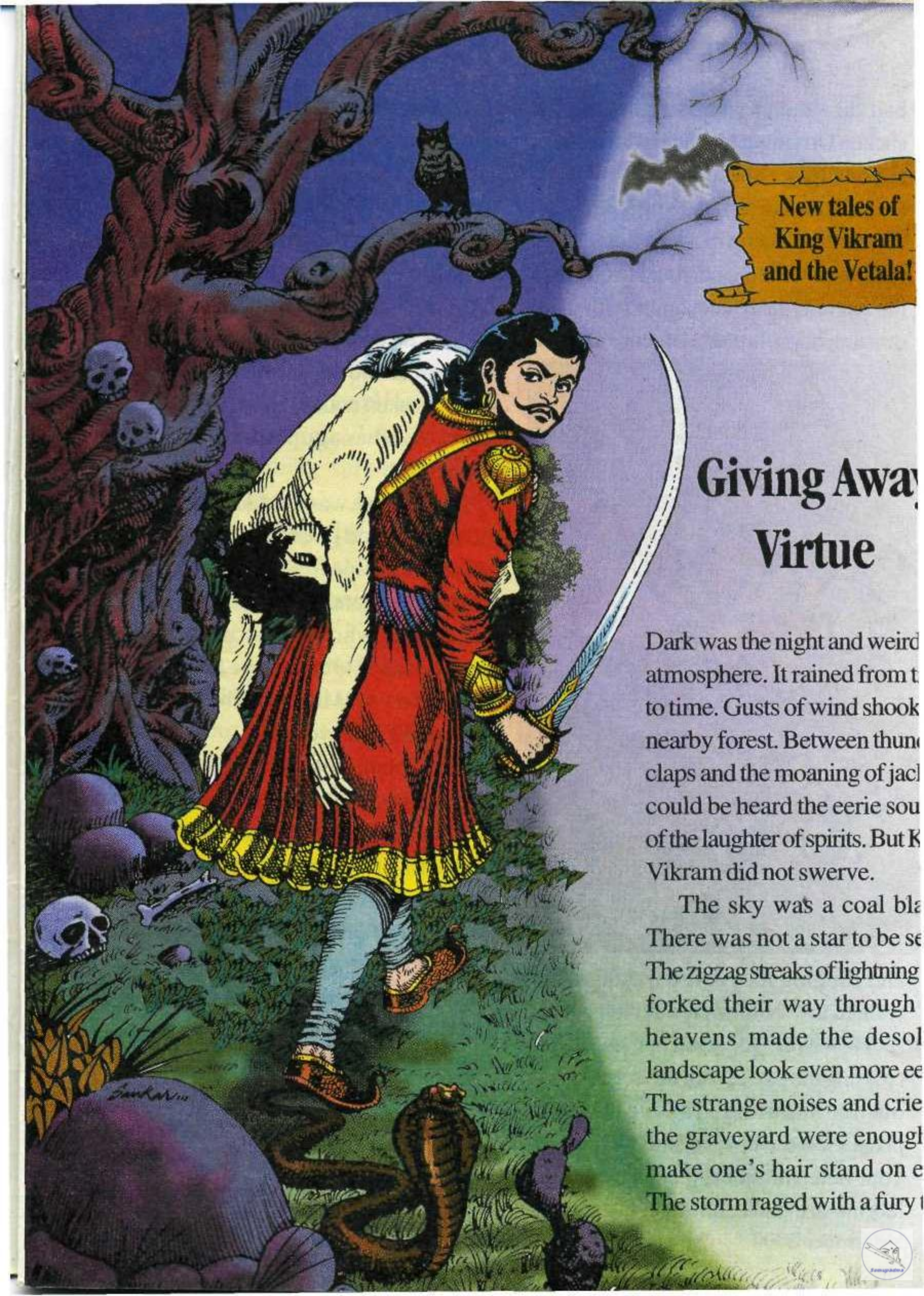
Jawaharlal became India’s Prime Minister in 1947. He continued to dominate the political and social destiny of India in that capacity for seventeen years. He passed away on May 27, 1964.

A great statesman of the 20th century, a

pioneer in cultivating peace in the international arena, Jawaharlal Nehru was an effective writer, too. His *Glimpses of World History*, consisting of letters written to his only child, Indira Gandhi who also became the Prime Minister of the country, is a highly readable book. His *Autobiography* and *Discovery of India* are equally significant works.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU





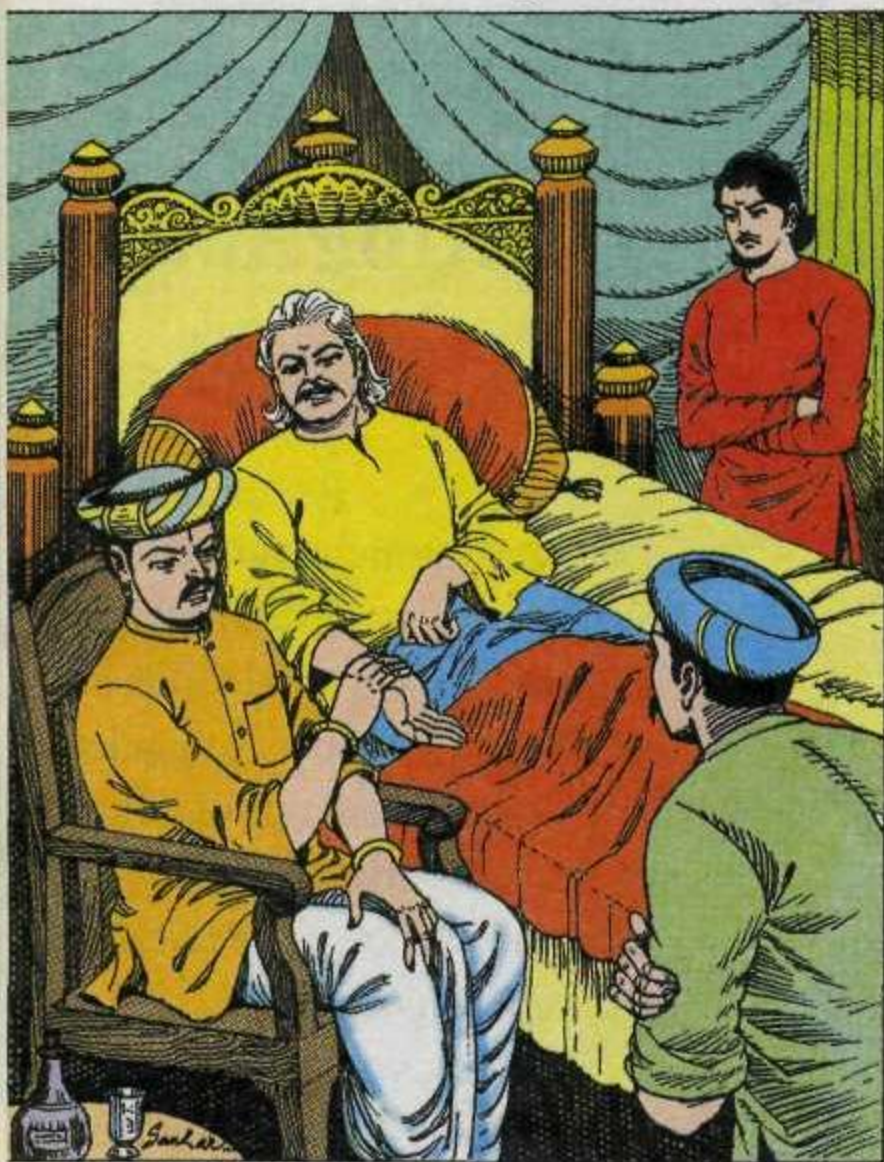
New tales of
King Vikram
and the Vetala!

Giving Away Virtue

Dark was the night and weird atmosphere. It rained from time to time. Gusts of wind shook nearby forest. Between thunderclaps and the moaning of jackals could be heard the eerie sound of the laughter of spirits. But King Vikram did not swerve.

The sky was a coal black. There was not a star to be seen. The zigzag streaks of lightning forked their way through the heavens made the desolate landscape look even more eerie. The strange noises and cries of the graveyard were enough to make one's hair stand on end. The storm raged with a fury.

had all sane creatures scurrying for shelter. Driving rain made it difficult for anyone to see more than a few steps ahead. But undeterred, King Vikram set off after the Vetala that had flown back to the tree with the corpse. He climbed the ancient tree once again with grim determination, brought the corpse down



and flinging it over his shoulders, he walked towards the cremation ground.

However, as soon as he began crossing the place, with the corpse lying on his shoulder, the Vetala that possessed the corpse said : “O King, your determination, persistence, and labour are unmatched, no doubt.

However, I’m not able to fathom why you’re doing all this. Have you undertaken this hard labour to atone for your sins or to earn and benefit from virtue? Or maybe you want to help someone else? But let me tell you one thing. Such resolution in earning virtue may not take you to your goal. To help you understand this and to remove any such mistaken notion, I shall tell you the story of Dhanagupta and his son Gunagupta.

“Gunagupta was a virtuous man who did many good deeds and yet he was not able to achieve his heart’s desire. On the other hand his father, who was a sinner and who had harmed many people, was able to achieve his goal so easily. How was that possible? Listen to me and I’ll tell you.”

The Vetala then started the story of Dhanagupta.

Dhanagupta lived in a town in the kingdom of Avanti. He was a very wealthy man but an incorrigible miser. He was such a miser that he would not even give away the crumbs from his plate. He cheated many people out of their inheritance and wealth, and thus amassed his riches. The more his sins grew, the more ruthless and cruel he became. The more he had, the more he wanted. He was willing to do anything in his search for riches. Suddenly, at the



age of fifty, he was struck down by paralysis. He could not move at all, and had to stay in bed all the time.

Gunagupta was the exact opposite of his father. He was a soft-spoken, virtuous man. He was very upset to see his father very ill and called the best doctors to cure him.

Dhanagupta did get better, but lost the use of his right hand and his speech. He could not talk at all and had to manage everything through signs. Doctors tried their best, but could not give him back his speech or the use of his hand. Finally, they told him that he would have to be an invalid for the rest of his life.

Gunagupta now started looking after his father's business. At the same time, he was constantly on the lookout for someone who could cure his father. Since the doctors had given up hope on his father, he started going to sadhus and sages in the hope that one of them would tell him how his father could be cured. The whole family was anxious to see Dhanagupta back to normal.

One day, a sadhu called Mahananda came to Gunagupta's house. He and his family received him and honoured him. Gunagupta said: "Please, sir, my father has been struck down in his prime. Can something be done to him? Please examine him and tell us how he can get

better."

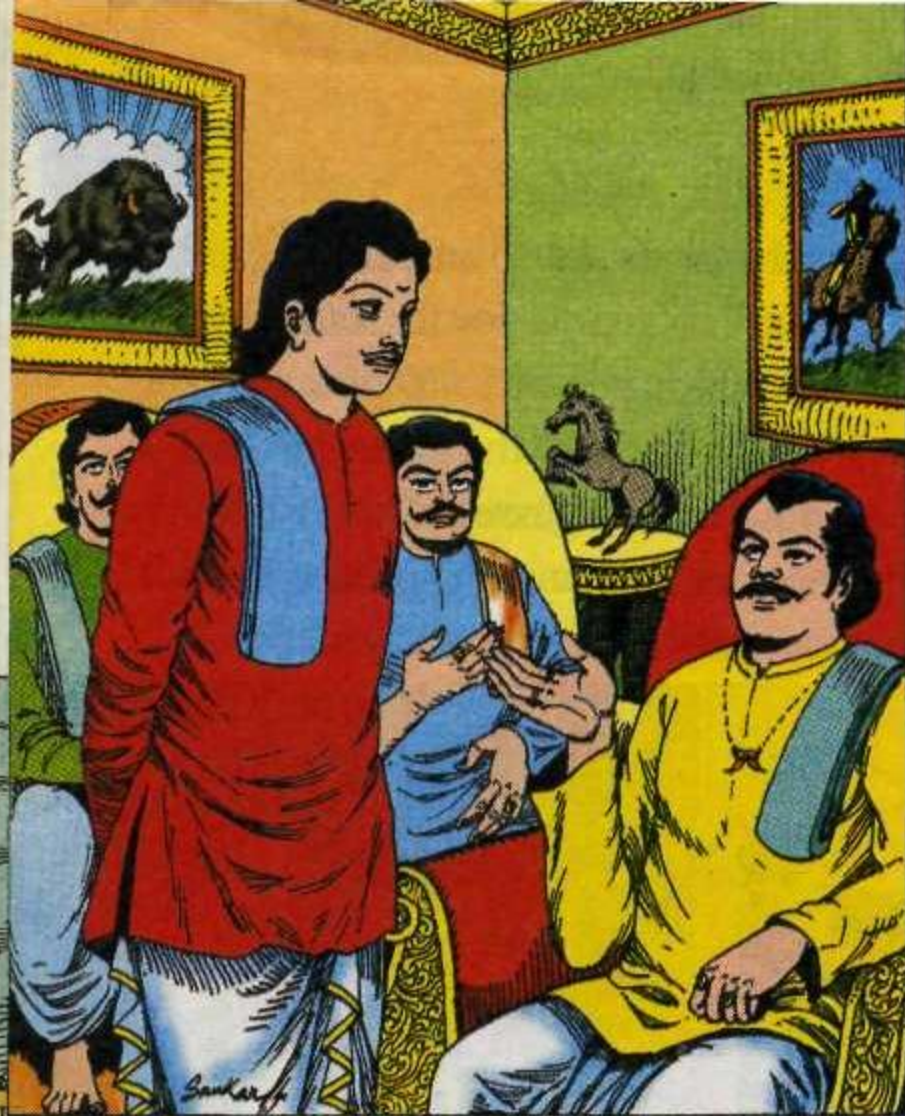
Mahananda did so and then closed his eyes in contemplation for some time. After a while, he said: "Your father is suffering for all the sins he had committed. He amassed all this wealth by cheating and harassing people. He'll recover only if he gives away all his ill-



gotten riches."

Dhanagupta was struck by these wise words of Mahananda and nodded his head in complete agreement. He drew up a gift deed to hand over his entire wealth to Gunagupta. Amazingly, he at once grew better and soon started speaking and working like normal. The





whole family was thrilled and set about preparing to celebrate the miracle when, suddenly, Manigupta, Gunagupta's eldest son fell dreadfully ill. He could not speak or move his left hand. As can be imagined, Gunagupta was beside himself with sorrow. He appealed to Mahananda for help.

Mahananda said : "The effect of the sins of your father are now being felt by your son. The wealth you have got is tainted by those sins. Now the only way out of this is to use all that wealth to do good for others and hope that all that good will result in freeing your son of his illness."

Dhanagupta was really anxious about his grandson's condition. He also felt

guilty because his actions had caused all these misfortunes. He told Gunagupta to return his fortune to him and leave him to his fate so that the rest of the family could live happily. Gunagupta, however, would not hear of that. Dhanagupta was so unhappy that he decided to go on a long pilgrimage to atone for his sins. He hoped that this would cure his grandson.

Gunagupta, in the meantime, immersed himself in good works. There was not an act of charity that he did not perform or a needy person he did not help. He helped rebuild temples, started free schools for the poor, and set up hospitals. A whole year passed thus. No matter how much money Gunagupta gave away, he found that his income kept rising. However his son did not get any better. Gunagupta was worried and at his wit's end. He wondered what kind of good deeds he had to do to make his son better. Meanwhile he became famous all over the land for his charity and goodness.

One day, the king of the land fell very ill. Big putrid boils broke out on his back and the doctors could not get rid of them. The king was unable to carry on with his work and the ministers ruled the kingdom on his behalf. At that time, Mahananda arrived in the capital. The king received him graciously and asked for his advice.



Mahananda said : "O King! No doubt you're good and virtuous. But as a king, you have committed many sins unknowingly in the course of your duties. Medicines cannot cure this disease. But if you can find a virtuous man in your kingdom who is willing to donate all the fruits of his virtue to you, then these boils will vanish."

The king said in despair : "You yourself will have to tell me where to search for such a man who will be willing to give away the benefit of a life time of virtue." Mahananda mentioned Gunagupta's name. And so, he was sent for.

Gunagupta said : "Your majesty, my virtue does not seem to have helped me at all. My son is as ill as ever. I don't think it'll help you either."

Mahananda interrupted to say : "You cannot say that. Your son has taken on the sins of his grandfather and so will earn virtue from his sufferings. The result of your good deeds has been that you have earned more wealth than you could have imagined."

"But Swami, I did not do good deeds to earn wealth," replied Gunagupta. "I want my son to be completely cured."

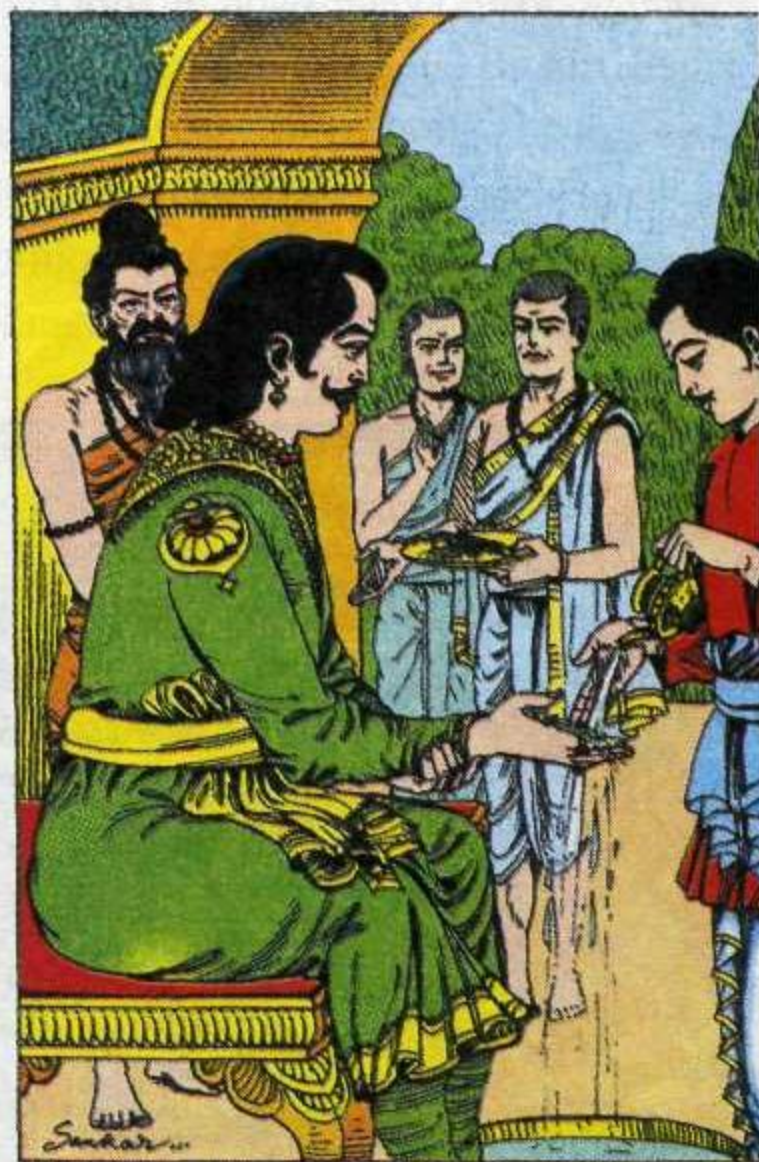
"Well," said Mahananda, "you've done your good deeds with your father's wealth. Only if you use the money that you have earned to do good deeds will

you be able to achieve your heart's desire."

"Then," Gunagupta asked the sage, "I haven't earned the virtue that'll help my son. Then if I give all my virtue to the king, I will be where I was, won't I? My son, too, will then become what he was. Am I right?"

"You have to judge and decide for yourself," replied Mahananda.

Gunagupta, after a bit of thought, decided to donate all his virtue to the king. When the ceremony was over, the king's illness vanished and was freed of the boils. The grateful king wanted to



reward Gunagupta. But he declined saying, he wanted nothing that came from his father's wealth. He asked the king to use the money for the welfare of the people.

Then Gunagupta returned home with Mahananda. They found that Dhanagupta had, in the meantime, returned from his pilgrimage. A miracle took place then. When Dhanagupta gave his grandson the Ganga water he had brought, the boy sat up completely cured.

The Vetala stopped the story there and said : "O King, Gunagupta did so much good and yet his son did not get cured. But his father, who was a sinner, was able to achieve the cure with the power of his pilgrimage. Why is that so? If you know the answer to my doubt and yet decide not to speak, your head

will break into smithereens! So, do speak if you know the answer."

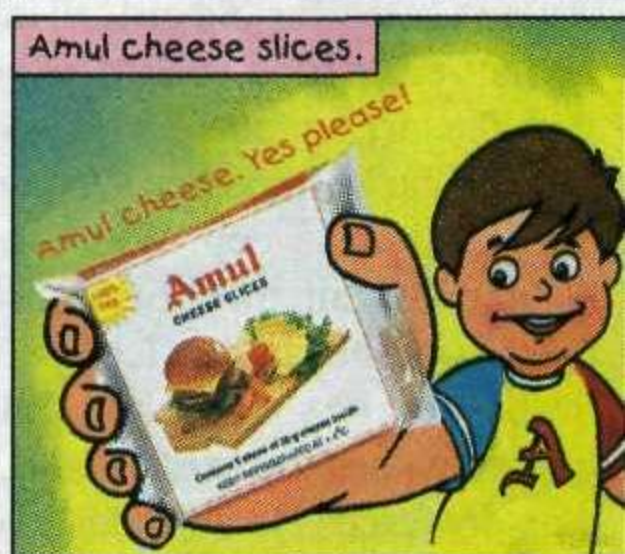
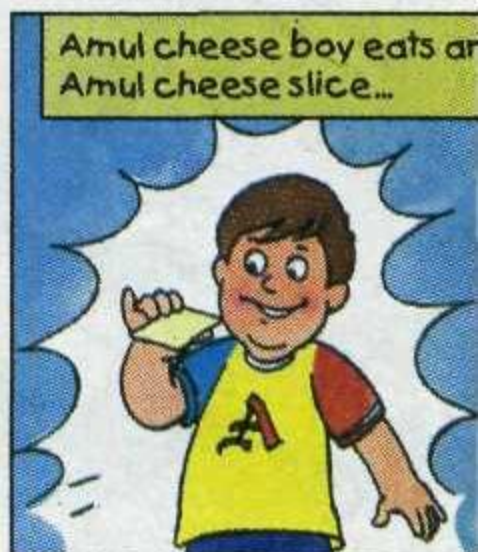
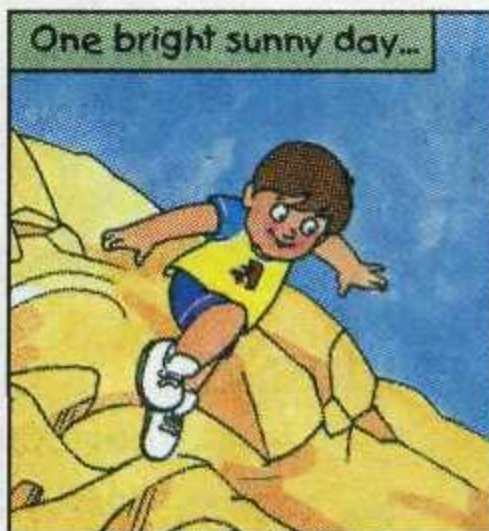
King Vikramaditya said : "When Dhanagupta repented his sins, he gave his wealth away, and set off on his pilgrimage, he stopped being a sinner. But Manigupta's cure was not the result of the Ganga water that Dhanagupta brought, but the good his father had done. As long as Gunagupta did good with a selfish motive, it did not get him his heart's desire. But he unselfishly donated all the fruits of his virtue to the king. It was this unselfish act of charity that brought about the cure, and Gunagupta's prayers were answered."

The Vetala once again got Vikramaditya to break his silence and flew back to the same old tree taking the corpse with him. King Vikramaditya drew his sword and went after the Vetala.



THE AMUL CHEESE BOY

IN PICNIC PANIC



Children IN THE NEWS

RESCUE ACT, WITH A DIFFERENCE



Fourteen-year-old Davide Cece escaped a watery grave, thanks to a dolphin named Filippo. The boy and his father were sailing off Manfredonia, in south Italy, when their boat was rocked by a huge wave and the boy went overboard. Davide, who does not know swimming, was sinking. A 2.7 metre long dolphin, which was swimming along the boat, saw the boy struggling in the water. It went

up to him and prodded his back so that he would not sink. Davide realised that the dolphin was trying to help him, so he hung on to the sea-animal which pushed him to the surface till he could be pulled back to the boat by his father. The fishermen of the place later gave a name to the dolphin and made it their mascot.

WAITED IN WELL TILL RESCUED

Back home in Kerala, 14-year-old Akbar had just returned from school and was eating a late lunch when he heard some shouts. It was a boy in the neighbourhood - raising an alarm on seeing a two-year-old girl fall into an 8 m deep well. Akbar left his half-eaten food, rushed to the well, and in one jump he was with the girl, supporting her with one hand and holding on to the pipeline with another. Women gathered in numbers but could only wail and weep. When the men folk turned up after a 90-minute wait, they lowered a bucket and Akbar placed the baby in it. She was hauled up to safety. Akbar was too big for the bucket ; he shouted he would use the rope to climb up, but he was by then too exhausted. Then a chair big enough for him was lowered. He sure deserves a Bravery Award, doesn't he?



NOW, A GIRL MAHOUT?

We have heard of “mothers” being employed in some zoos to look after the little calves and cubs. But 12-year-old Vijayalakshmi has a 10ft tall, 31-year-old tusker to take care of. Ashok Kumar of Triprayar in Thrissur, Kerala, had bought and brought Srikrishna from an elephant show in Bihar. After the mahouts had gone back to Bihar, he realised that the animal was used to hearing commands only in Hindi! He was in a fix. Anyway, he took courage, got hold of a strong, long staff, and took the elephant for a walk. His brother-in-law Girish gave him company, in case ... It was then that the 7th Standard daughter of Ashok Kumar remembered that she learns Hindi at school. Srikrishna must have been amused when he heard words like “Chalo” and



“Hatho” from the girl. But they became instant friends. Now, it is an everyday sight to see Vijayalakshmi taking out the elephant for an evening walk after she returns from school! She confidently leads him by the tusk.

A FEAT BY TEETH



Don't ask Seema Bhadoria of Datia, in Madhya Pradesh, which brand of toothpaste / powder she uses. This 10th Standard student may not reveal the brand name. Instead, she may ask you to watch her pull an aeroplane with her, yes, teeth. That is

what she did at the Bairagarh airport at Bhopal. It was a 14-seater Government plane. While she waits for an entry in the Guinness Book of Records, she has sought permission to pull a Boeing 747! Are *your* teeth shaking already?



BEARS OF THE HIMALAYAS

Most Himalayan villages lie in the valleys where there are streams, tolerably fertile soil, and protection from biting winds that come through the mountain passes in winter. The houses are usually made of rough granite and have sloping slate roofs that enable the heavy monsoon rain to run off easily. During the dry autumn months, the roofs are often covered with pumpkins, left there to ripen in the sun.

One October night when I was sleeping in a friend's house in Gharwal, I was woken by a rumbling and thumping on the roof. I woke my friend and asked him what was happening.

"It's only a bear," he said.

"Is it trying to get in?" I asked.

"No, it must have come for the pumpkins."

A little later we looked out of the small window and saw a black bear making off through a field like a thief in the night with a pumpkin held to his chest.

In winter, when snow covers the high mountains, the brown and black Himalayan bears descend to lower altitudes in search of food. Sometimes they forage in the fields. As they are short-sighted, and suspicious of anything that moves, they can be dangerous. But, like most wild animals, they will avoid human beings if they can and are aggressive only when accompanied by their cubs. The people are always advising me to run downhill if chased by a bear. They say that bears find it easier to run uphill than downhill.

Himalayan bears like pumpkins,



maize, plums, and apricots and, of course, honey. Once while I was sitting in an oak tree hoping to see a pair of pine martins who lived nearby, I heard the whining rumble of a bear and presently saw one amble into the clearing near the tree.

At first he put his nose to the ground and sniffed his way along until he came to a large ant-hill. Here he began huffing and puffing, blowing rapidly in and out of his nostrils. But he was soon disappointed, because the ant-hill had been deserted long before. And so, grumbling, he made his way to a wild plum tree and shinning quickly up the smooth trunk was soon perched on the topmost branches. It was only then that he saw me.

He at once scrambled several feet higher up the tree and laid himself out flat on a branch. It was not a very thick

branch and left a large expanse of the bear showing from either side. He tucked his head away behind another branch and so long as he could not see me, was satisfied that he was well-hidden, though he continued his anxious grumbling.

But like all bears, he was full of curiosity and slowly, inch by inch, his black snout appeared over the edge of the branch. As soon as his eyes came into view and met mine, he drew back with a jerk and hid his face.

He did this several times. I waited till he was not looking then moved some way down the tree. When he looked again and saw I was missing, he was so pleased that he stretched right across to another branch and helped himself to a plum. My burst of laughter so startled him that he tumbled out of the tree, dropped through the branches for some

15 feet and landed with a thud in a heap of dry leaves. He was quite unhurt but ran from the clearing, grunting and squealing with fright.

The inquisitiveness of bears was revealed to me on another occasion when, hearing that one had been active in a field of maize, I sat up for it at night in the company of a friend. We took up



our position on a high promontory of rock which gave us a clear view of the moonlit field. A little after midnight, a bear came down to the edge of the field, but he was suspicious and probably smelt that men had been about recently. He was however hungry, so after standing up as high as possible on his hind legs and peering about to see if the field was empty, he came cautiously out of the forest and made his way towards the ripe corn.

About halfway there, his attention was suddenly taken by some Buddhist prayer flags which had been strung up between two small trees. (They had probably been placed there by Tibetans, some of whom had settled not far away.) On spotting the flags, the bear gave a grunt of disapproval and began heading

back for the forest, but the fluttering flags were a puzzle he had to decipher, so after a few steps backward, he again stopped to watch them.

Eventually, he went straight up to the flags and pulled them all down. After examining them carefully, he moved on into the field of corn.

But my friend (whose field it was) decided that he was not going to lose any more of his crop, so he started shouting and the villagers woke up and came out of their houses beating drums and empty kerosene tins. Deprived of his dinner, the bear made off in a bad mood. He ran downhill and at a good speed, too, and I was glad I was not in his path just then. Uphill or downhill, an angry bear is best given a wide berth.





Dear friends,

Chandamama is happy to present this Special Section to commemorate November, the month dedicated to children.

In this issue, you will read several stories by children from all over India. These were selected from among the stories sent in by children in response to our announcement of a creative writing-cum-drawing contest.

They have been illustrated by young artists selected in the drawing contest.

Chandamama congratulates all of you, young contributors, to this special section. Keep up the good work.

For those of you whose entries have not been selected, we say, don't be disheartened. All the entries were so good that we had a difficult time choosing the best. Who knows, you may win in the next contest we run.

For those who've longed to participate, but couldn't, due to exams or other reasons, cheer up! We hope to bring you many more such opportunities in the future.

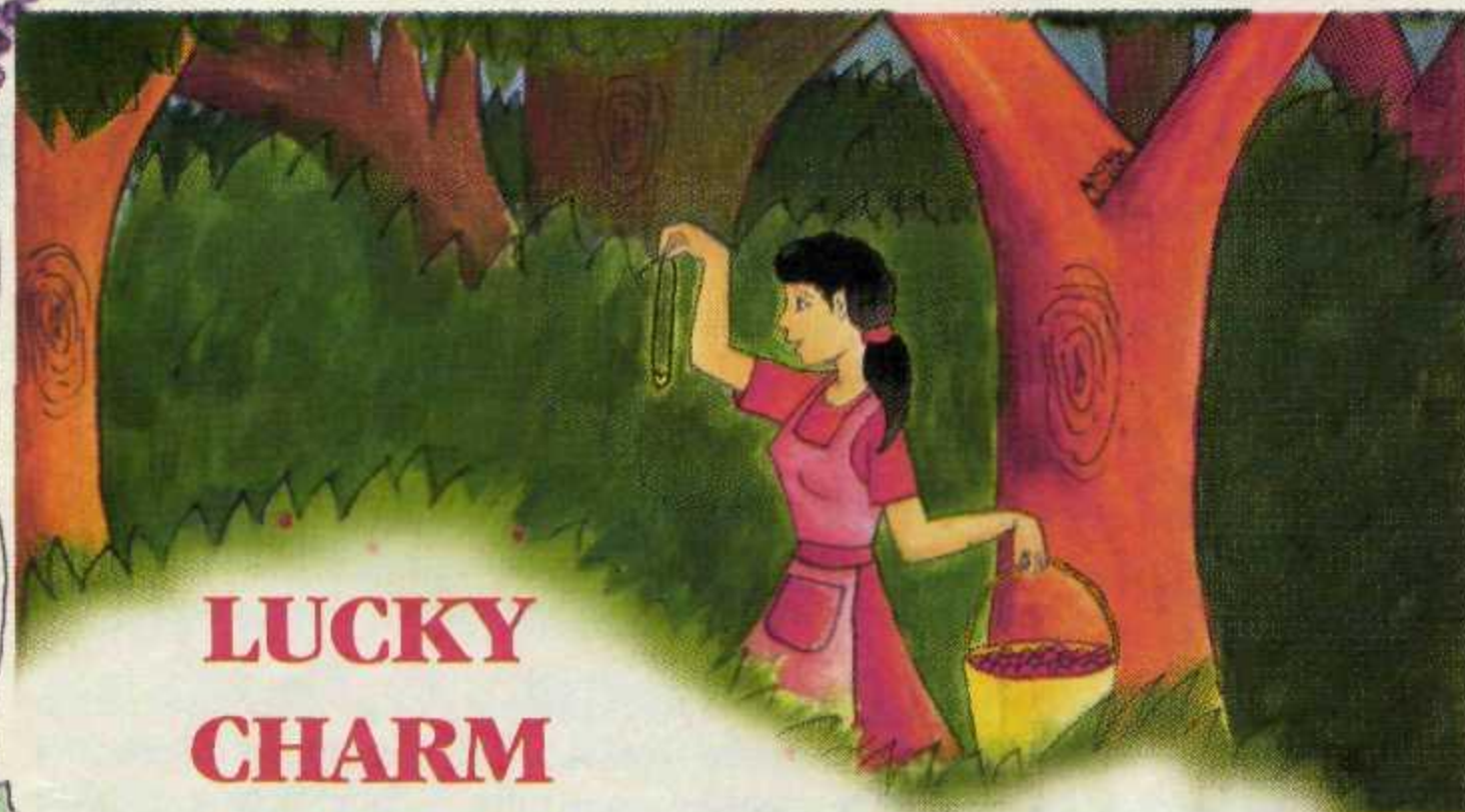
This special issue contains, apart from stories by children, some stories and features on your favourite festival, Diwali. We are into the festival season, and we thought it would be apt to tell you about that wonderful festival of lights that all of us look forward to, year after year. So the next time you pick a sparkler to light or go out to ignite that bomb, you will remember the significance of Diwali.

So, go ahead and plunge into the special pages of this issue. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Affectionately yours,

Viswam, Editor





Anjul Luniya, Maharashtra

LUCKY CHARM

By Nitya Tripuraneni, USA

Once upon a time, there lived a girl named Neena. She lived in a quiet, friendly village deep in the forests of the Himalayas. The village was called Gangapur.

Neena and her younger sister, Swetha, picked corn, cooked food, and cleaned the small house they lived in, since their mother was too ill to attend to any chores. She just lay in bed, reading books, checking Neena and Swetha's homework (and often helping them), listening to music, taking her medicines, and going for frequent check-ups. Neena and Swetha often played near the lake close to Gangapur with their friends.

One day, while Neena was in the woods trying to find berry bushes to pick, she spotted a sparkle of light that

came from a nearby tree. Curious, she approached it. She picked it up and gasped. It was a heart-shaped locket that was polished in gold. The gold finish caught the light of the sun and ran across Neena's face. She opened it and looked inside. There was nothing in it. Then she closed it carefully and dropped it into her apron pocket and ran off.

Back home, she took the bucketful of berries that she had picked and put them on the kitchen table. It was Swetha's seventh birthday today, and Neena knew she was in for some extra cooking.

Soon it was time for dinner. Swetha was excited; and Neena was exhausted. But all the hard work paid off when everybody complimented her cooking.

Dinner over, it was time to open the presents. Swetha eagerly tore open one wrapped in a paper with stars all over it. It was an Anjali doll,



which was very rare and very expensive. Neena looked at the card and realised it was from her mother.

"Thank you, mom!" Swetha exclaimed happily. Then she got a worried look on her face. "But this must have cost you a lot of money. You didn't have to go through all this trouble just to give me an exclusive Anjali doll."

"Nothing is too much for my sweet children," her mother said affectionately, hugging Swetha.

The girl then grabbed a present with roses printed all over it. Roses were her favourite flower. Inside was a beautiful music box with some exquisite carvings all over it. The gift was from Neena.

"Oh, thank you so much, sister," Swetha said, delighted with the gift. "I'll treasure it."

Neena smiled. "Here," she said, pointing to a tiny key in the lock of the music box, "you just simply turn the key to the left and it opens. You can play almost every tune on it."

"Wait a minute! Who are these two gifts from?" Neena said, picking two more gifts that remained.

She sneaked a peek at the card. It was from Grandpa. The other gift was from her father. Eagerly Swetha tore

open the parcel and it revealed a beautiful heart-shaped locket, just like the one Neena had picked up. Swetha opened it up and saw that there were two pictures of herself and her mother, and Neena and their father.

The last present, which still remained unopened, was

covered with lilies, another of Swetha's favourite flowers. In it was a delicate glass dolphin, one of Swetha's favourite animals.

Soon Neena and Swetha got ready for bed.

Neena carefully put away the locket in her jewellery box and snuggled into her bedcovers.

"Today sure was a great day, wasn't it, Neena?" Swetha asked.

"Yes, it sure was," Neena admitted.

"Now go to sleep, Swetha."

"Okay, good night."

"Good night."

As she waited for sleep to take over, Neena wondered whether the locket that she found in the woods had not brought joy for the entire family. The locket was also to prove a lucky charm by helping her mother recover from her illness, enabling her to lead a normal life once again.



Anjul Luniya, Maharashtra

PATIENCE

By Sheetal D. Vadagave, Maharashtra

Anil and Sunil were two poor brothers studying in school. They were staying in a free hostel. Though they were very poor, they were determined to get educated, so that they could stand on their feet. They did part time jobs in some store, to earn some money to pay their school fees. But the money they earned was not enough. They even contemplated quitting school. Then they remembered they had a rich uncle. They decided to approach him for help.

They wrote him a letter requesting him to send them Rs. 500, so that they could pay their fees and continue their studies. Their uncle was a kind-hearted person. Soon they received

Rs.100 by money order from him.

Sunil was very annoyed at receiving such a small amount. He said to Anil, "Our uncle perhaps spends more money on petrol every day, but when it comes to helping his needy nephews, he has become a miser. This money is not going to help us. We will return the money, instead of being indebted to him all our lives for his miserly help."

But Anil, the elder brother, was not so short-tempered and asked his younger brother to wait till the next morning before he took any hasty step.

By evening Sunil's anger slowly subsided and he realised that he should not act in haste.

Next morning, Anil said to Sunil, "You were wrong yesterday, when you wanted to return the money in anger. Our uncle is a kind and generous person. Who else would send so much money merely on receipt of a post card? We have not seen him for many years, yet he offered his help when we needed it most."

"After all Rs. 100 is not a small amount.

It would take us weeks before we could earn this amount, working in the stores. If we make good use of this help, I am sure our uncle will help us in future. We must be worthy of the help."

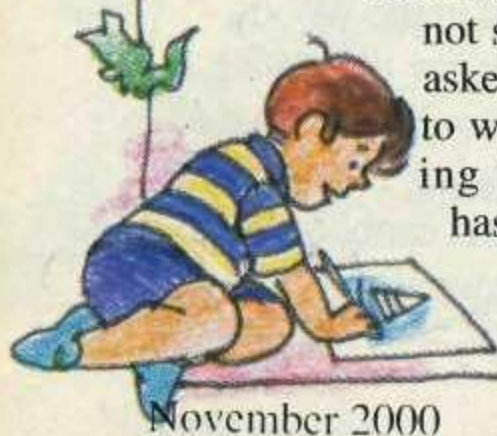
Sunil agreed with his brother. They bought some books and paid their fees with that money. They studied very hard and passed their examination with flying colours.

Anil sent their mark sheets and progress card to his uncle with a letter of thanks. Anil's uncle was overwhelmed when he received the letter and was impressed by their humility. He was pleased to see that his nephews had not only used the money wisely but were also grateful to him. He immediately sent them Rs. 3,000 and promised them more help for their future studies.

Both brothers studied hard and Anil became a doctor and Sunil an engineer.

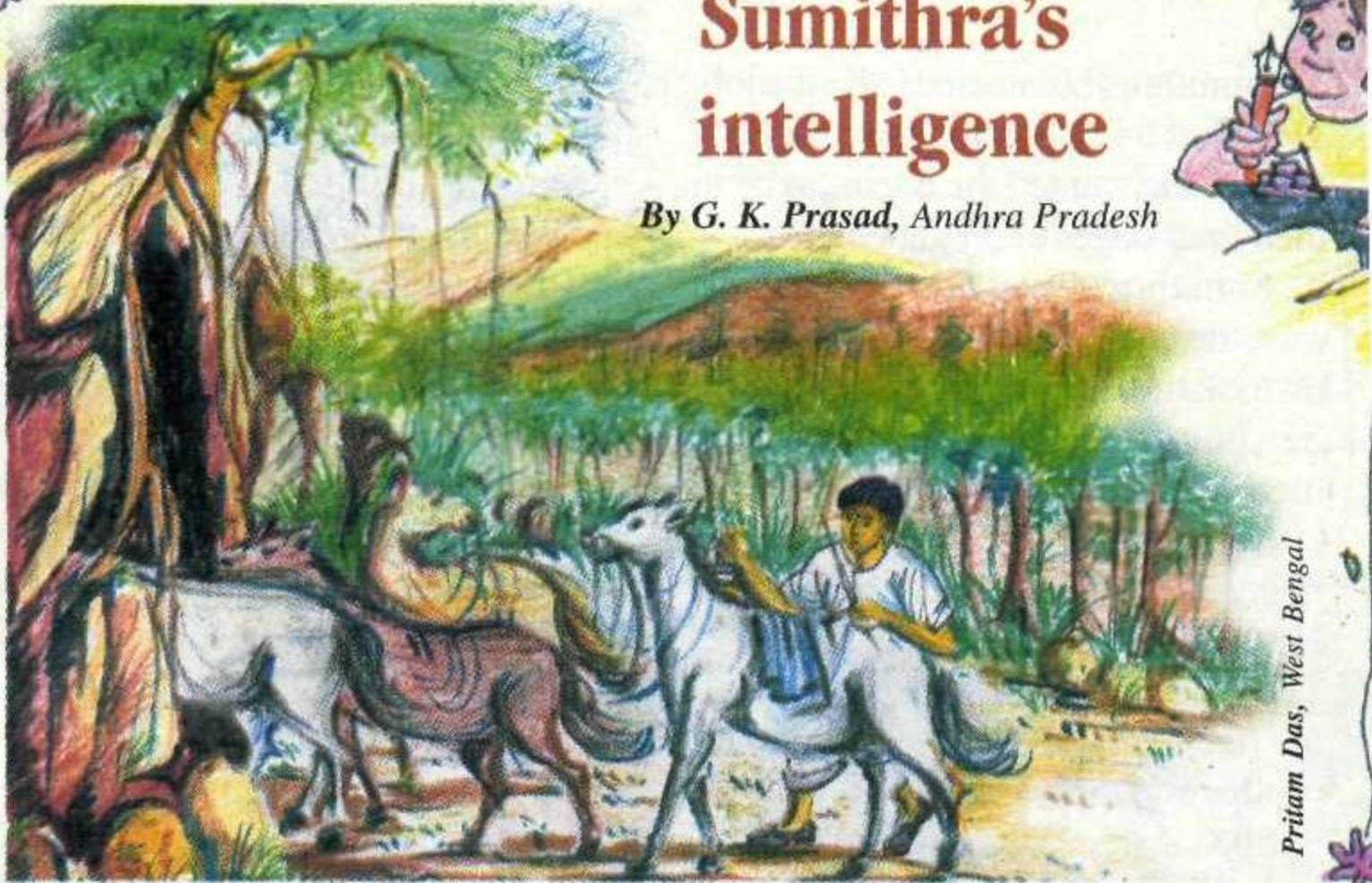


Agni Chemburkar, Maharashtra



Sumithra's intelligence

By G. K. Prasad, Andhra Pradesh



Pritam Das, West Bengal

Sunandha was the King of Kosilika, a small kingdom. It was attacked a couple of times by bigger neighbouring states. Though King Sunandha displayed much courage and tenacity and won those battles, the wars cost him very dear. The kingdom became poorer and poorer. The king as well as the people were worried about this.

They were also worried because King Sunandha did not have any heir.

Long back, during the reign of King Sunandha's father, the King of Kaundinya, a neighbouring kingdom, had looted their country. He did not take the booty with him but had buried it in a cave. An aged minister suggested a plan to the king.

"Why don't we send someone to the cave to recover the

loot? It will help our country in this difficult period of financial trouble," said the minister.

"But many persons have lost their lives trying to enter the cave. Is it wise to try again now?" reminded the king.

The minister suggested that this was perhaps the right time. "We can also announce that the person who brings the loot back will be made the crown prince of the kingdom. As you are childless, this kingdom does not have an heir. And that has also been a worry for all of us here. This scheme will solve both the problems. Our financial position will improve and we will also get an heir to the throne."

The king announced this to his subjects. After a week, a youth named

Sumithra volunteered to do the job. He asked for ten pregnant horses and a torch. He wanted the horses to be in their final stages of pregnancy.

Sumithra went to the cave. On his way, the horses delivered their foals. He took the horses with him, leaving the young ones behind. He took the torch, lit it and went into the cave.

On entering the cave, he found many dead bodies and skeletons there. He had to go deep into the cave. There he found the gold. He loaded the loot on each of the horse's back. Suddenly the torch went out. He groped in the dark and climbed on to the back of one of the horses. Somehow, the horses found their way and came out of the cave in spite of the darkness.

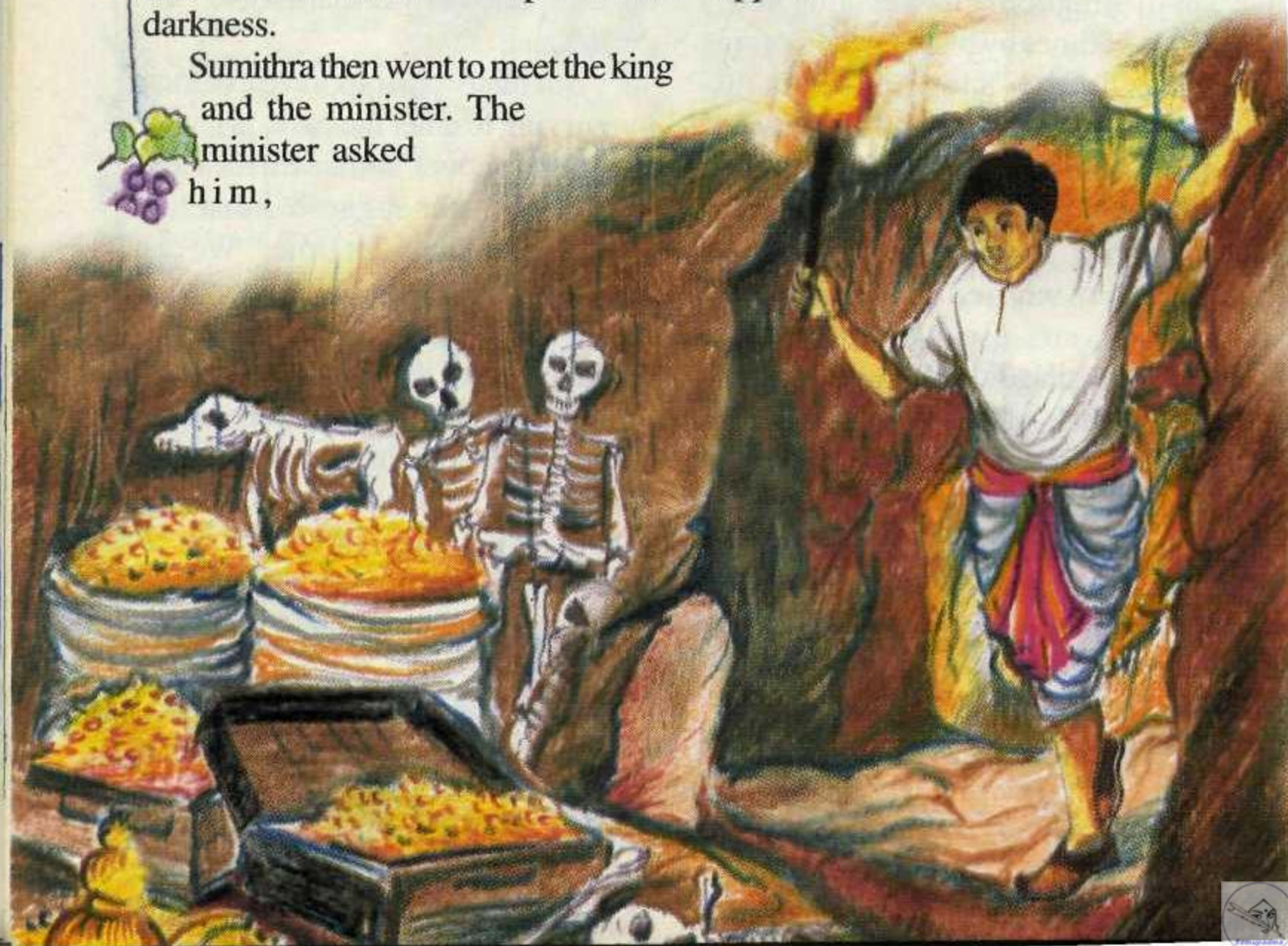
Sumithra then went to meet the king and the minister. The minister asked him,

"How were you able to come out of the cave alive when others could not?"

Sumithra replied, "Others had died because they did not have a torch with them and they got lost in the cave. But horses have a good sense of smell. They can find their way to their young ones by just smelling them.

"I left the young ones outside the cave and took the mothers inside. When the torch went out, we were able to come out of the cave because of this sense of the horses. This was why I had asked for pregnant horses," explained Sumithra.

The minister was happy that Sumithra was not only brave but also intelligent. He was made the heir apparent.



True Happiness

By Anubhav Maurya, U.P.

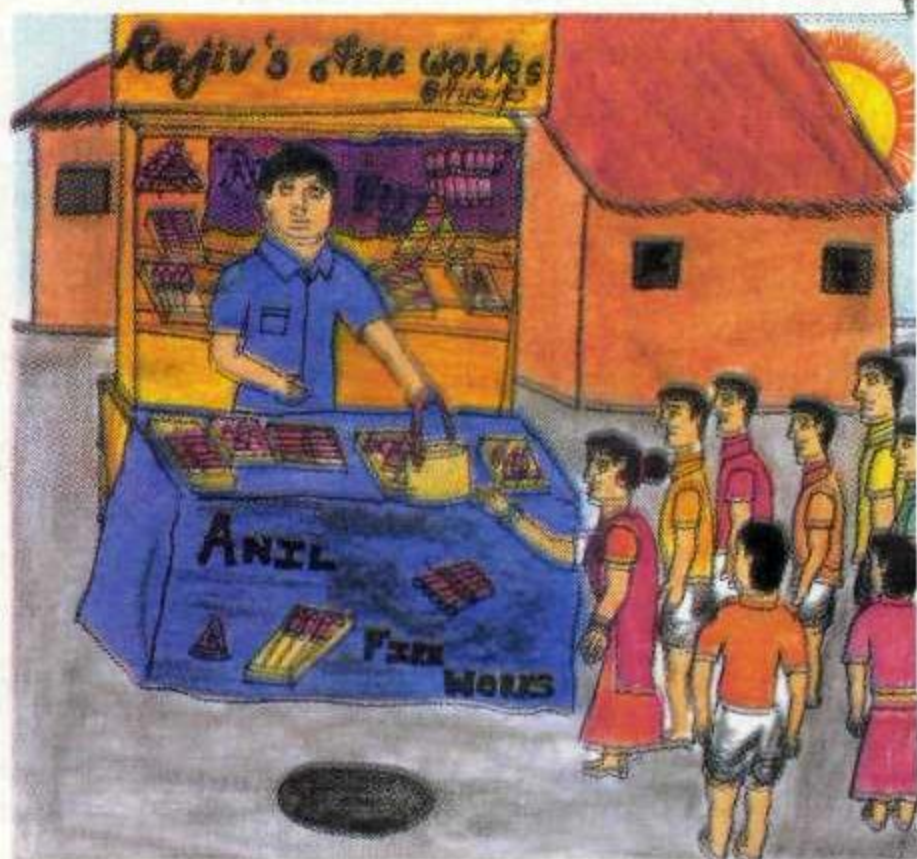
Rajiv was very happy today and why not, Diwali was fast approaching. Every year he used to set up a crackers shop. This year, too, he had set up the shop. His shop was doing brisk business as his wares were the most reliable ones in the whole market.

Last year he had made a profit of Rs. 800. With this he bought himself books, paid his as well as his sister's fees. He deposited some money in the bank and gave the balance to his parents for the household expenses. His parents were very happy that day. Encouraged by that, Rajiv set up the shop once again with great enthusiasm.

Some six to seven months ago, Rajiv's father fell seriously ill. Because of this, they had to sell their land, which was their only source of income. Now they had very little money to fall back on.

Naturally all this threatened to disturb Rajiv's studies. Rajiv wanted to ensure that there was enough money to meet his school expenses. So he started taking tuitions. Because of his involvement and hard work, many children came to him

to study. He earned Rs. 950 from these tuitions. This started to improve his family's financial position. With this money he bought medicines and his father's health improved. Within the next two to three months, Rajiv repaid all the loans.



Agni Chemburkar, Maharashtra

With the improvement in his family's finances, this year Rajiv set up a big and beautiful crackers shop. On the very first day he earned a profit of Rs. 530. There were just three days for Diwali. The next day, there was a big crowd in front of the shop waiting for him even before he opened the shop. It was with great difficulty that he could give them the crackers. He was ecstatic because he made more profit than the

previous day.

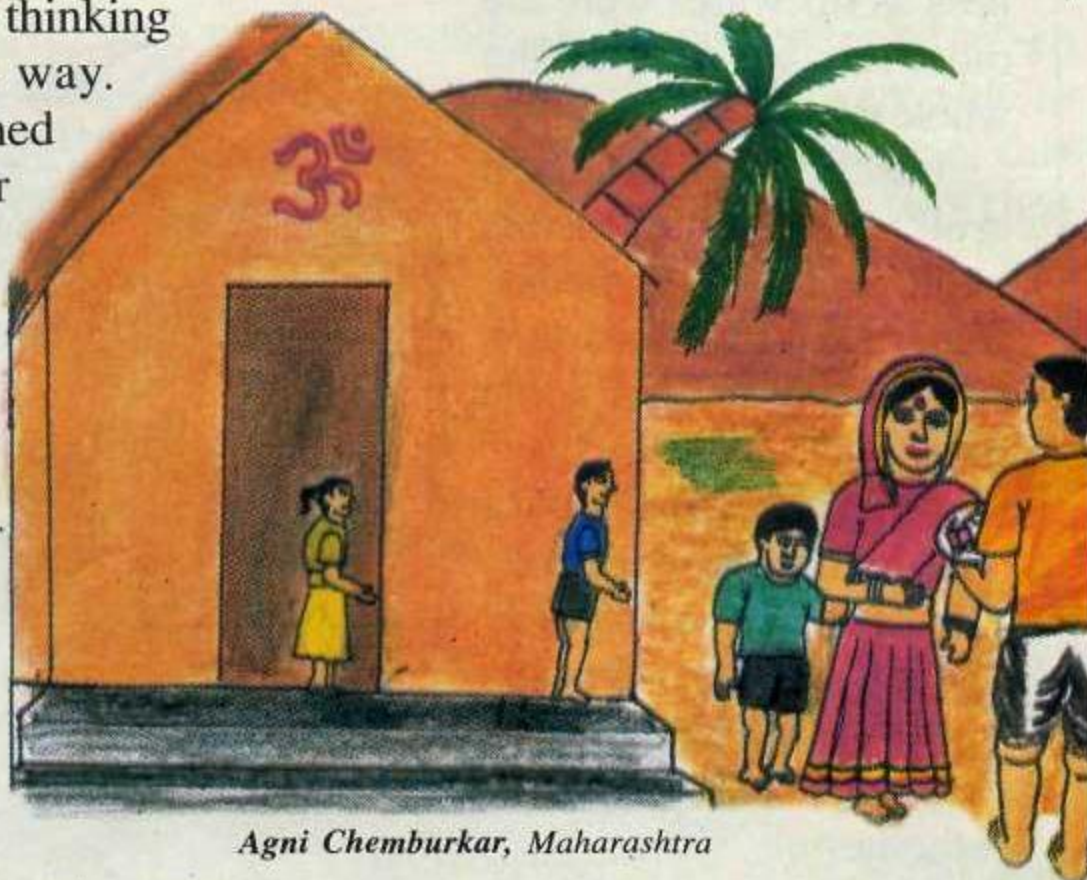
Rajiv wanted to take that money and reach home fast. He had just gone some distance, when he heard cries from a house. He could not stop himself from going there. Three small children were pestering their mother for crackers and sweets. Maybe they did not have money. He was thinking about it all along the way.

"Would I not have yearned for these had I been in their position? After all they are very small and innocent children. Should I not help them?" Rajiv became very pensive thinking on these lines. He went home and told his father about this. His father immediately accepted his suggestion and encouraged Rajiv to help them.

Next day, Rajiv went to the shop early, but he was restless. As soon as it was evening, he closed the shop. He filled a bag with crackers and sweets and went to that house. As soon as he reached there, he touched the feet of the old lady sitting there and gave the bag to her. The old lady was stunned and surprised on seeing it and asked, "Son, what is all this? And who are you?"

Rajiv said, "Mother, when I was passing by yesterday, I heard your children cry. I could not bear to see it.

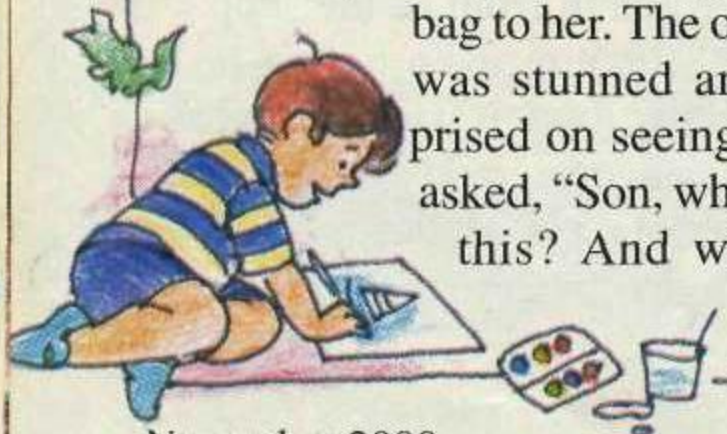
You have called me son. So, why should not a son help his mother? Mother, you must not refuse this small gift from me. If you had been in my position and if I had been poor, what would you have done?"



Agni Chemburkar, Maharashtra

Tears of joy rolled down from the old lady's eyes. And she said, "Son, which mother would not be happy, having a son like you?"

You are very kind-hearted and good," she blessed him. Just then, her three children came there. Seeing the crackers and sweets, their joy knew no bounds. Seeing their cheerful face, Rajiv was very happy. He left the old lady's house with contentment and returned home.



Way of the world

By Md. Shiraaz, Andhra Pradesh

Long, long ago, when all the animals used to talk, there lived a boy in a village. He had to walk through a forest to reach his school in a nearby village. One day, it so happened that when he was returning home he heard a crocodile crying in a nearby lake.

"Help me!" cried the crocodile.

"What's the problem with you?" asked the boy.

"I'm caught in a trap. Please save me!" cried the crocodile.

"But you will kill me!" exclaimed the boy.

"No! Believe me! Please come nearer," said the crocodile.

So, the boy went up to the crocodile and he was instantly caught by the teeth in its long mouth.

"Is this how you repay my goodness?" asked the boy.

"Of course," said the crocodile, out of the corner of his mouth. "This is the way of the world."

"I don't believe that," said the boy.

So, the crocodile agreed not to swallow him without getting the opinion of the first three persons who would pass by.

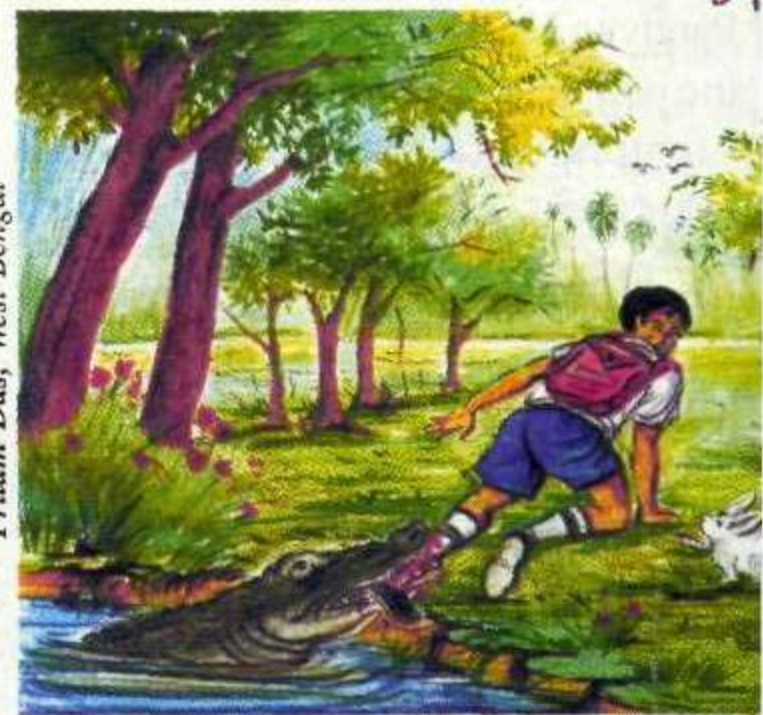
The first one to come their way was a donkey. When he heard of the problem, he said his

master loved him when he was young, but as he became old, his master drove him out.

The second one to pass by was a horse. He, too, had an opinion similar to that of the donkey.

The third one to come was a rabbit. When he was told of their problem, he said, "I can't decide who is correct until I clearly know what happened from the beginning."

So, the crocodile released the boy to tell the truth. Then, the clever rabbit asked the boy: "Do your villagers like crocodile meat?"

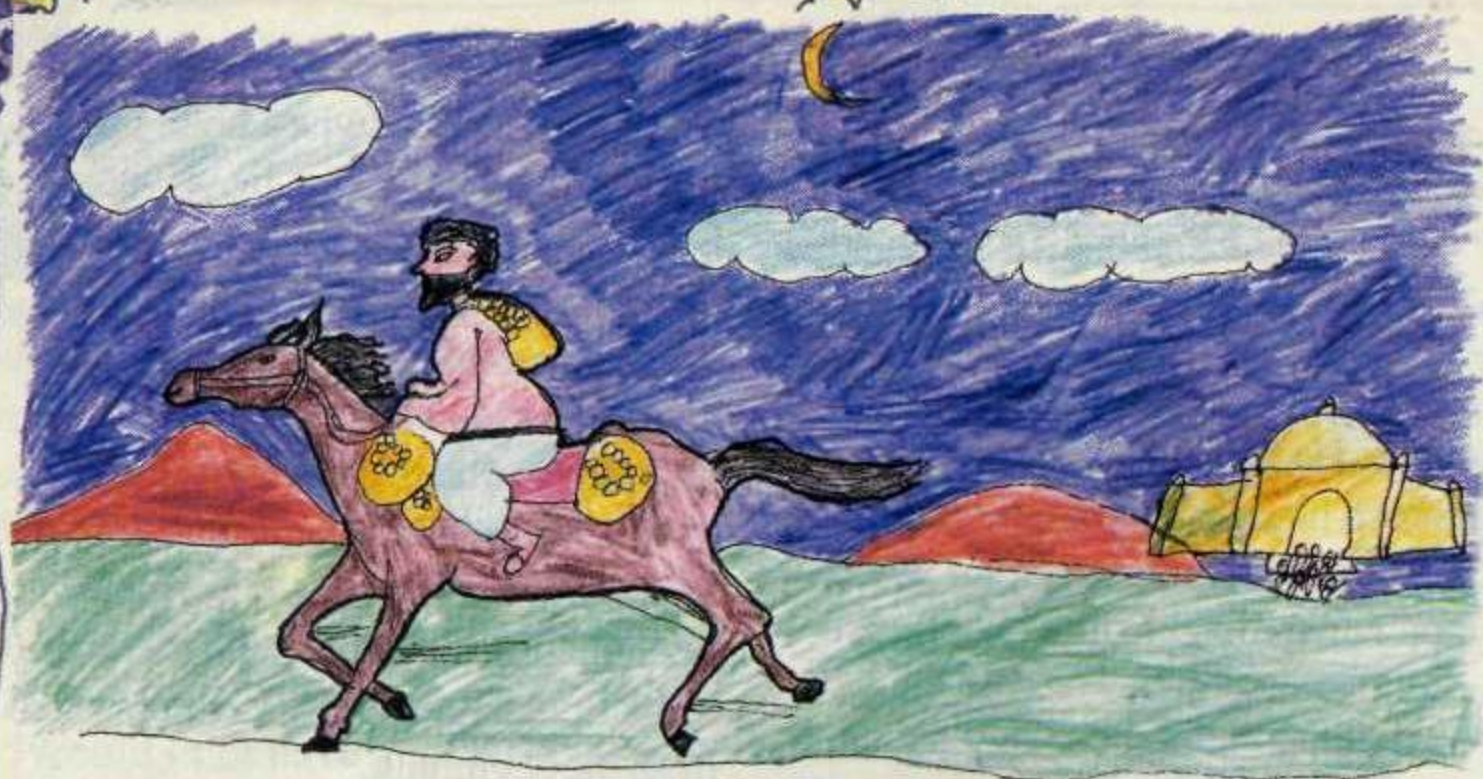


Pritam Das, West Bengal

"Why not?" replied the boy.

"Then, go and call your people," said the rabbit and went its way.

"So, the crocodile was right. This is the way of the world," the boy thought after realising the truth. And he ran back home.



V. Aadhavan, Tamilnadu

PATRIOTIC GANGULU

By Phani Shyam, Andhra Pradesh

Gangulu was a bandit in the Pandyan kingdom. He was a terror to the people of the kingdom. Many attempts were made to catch this dacoit, but he always evaded everyone's hands.

King Chandrasen had recently ascended the throne after the death of his father Suryasen. But he was not able to catch the bandit.

One night Gangulu burgled the house of a wealthy businessman. On his way out, the king's guards attacked him. He managed to give them a slip and sped away on his horse. He reached the borders of the capital city, where there was an old temple. He went and took

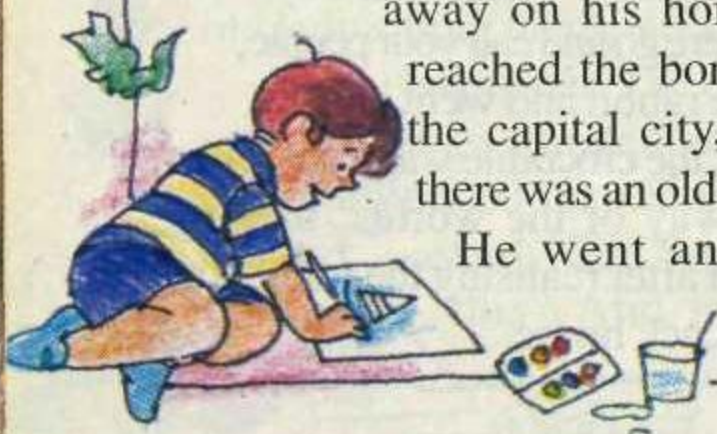
refuge in the dilapidated temple, leaving his horse outside.

After some time, two soldiers of the Pandyan kingdom arrived there along with their army chief. Hidden in the temple were some spies from the neighbouring kingdom of Konkan. It so happened that the two kingdoms were old enemies.

Neither the Pandyan soldiers nor the Konkan spies realised that the bandit was hiding in the temple.

The Pandyan army chief handed over a letter to the Konkan spies. The letter revealed the secrets of the kingdom and also suggested ways to capture the kingdom. He said, "This is the ideal time. The young Pandyan king, Chandrasen, is new and inexperienced. If your king attacks us now, he will

attacks us now, he will



surely win."

Gangulu the dacoit, who was hiding there, was shocked. He jumped out with a jerk, snatched the letter from the spies, mounted his horse and galloped away.

Both, the spies and the traitors, instantly took to their horses and gave him chase. They threw their swords at him. Gangulu's right shoulder was injured. But he did not give up. Though his shoulder was severely bleeding, Gangulu carried on manfully. He reached the palace and went straight up to King Chandrasen. He gave him the papers and narrated all that had happened.

The king's men soon captured the spies, the treacherous army chief and the soldiers.

That night the king could not sleep. He was in a great dilemma. "Should I

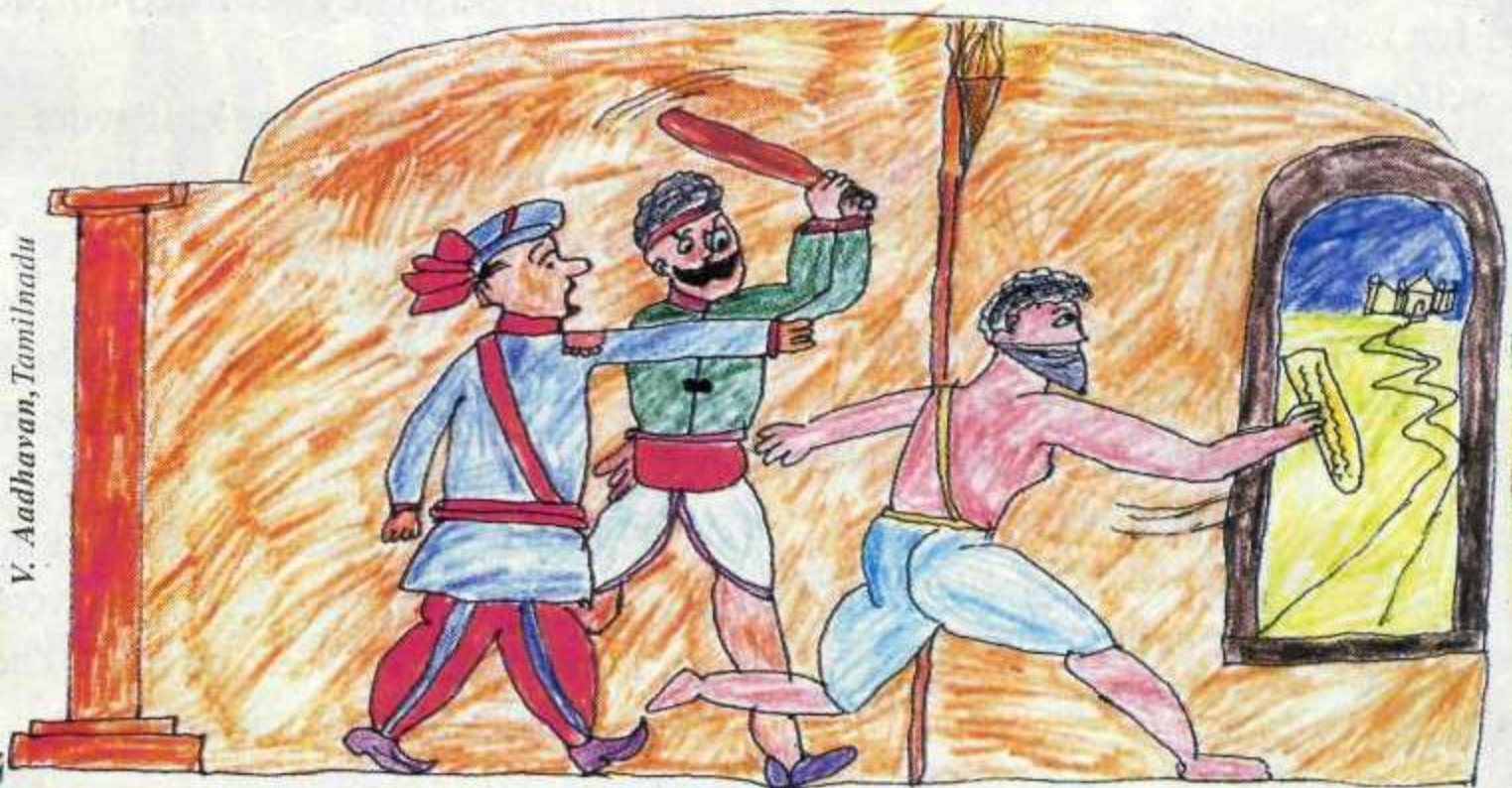
punish Gangulu or do I praise him? He put his life in danger to save the kingdom. And yet, he is a thief and we have been trying to catch him for a long time. Should I arrest him or not?" wondered the king.

Then his eyes fell on an old palm leaf manuscript that his father had given him.

The first page in the book read : '*there is no greater quality than patriotism*'. After reading this, the king made his decision and went to sleep.

In the morning, Chandrasen pronounced the death sentence on the traitors and praised the bandit for his patriotism. He also pardoned Gangulu, gave him a reprieve, and offered him a job in the palace.

V. Aadhavan, Tamilnadu



The king's handkerchiefs

By Sailabala Mohanty, Orissa

Once there was a king who loved to go hunting. He always went hunting in disguise. One day, after a long day's hunting, the king lost his way. He moved into that part of the jungle which was part of another kingdom.

Wandering here and there, he soon



Sarthak Sobhana Satpathy, Orissa

felt very thirsty. So he searched for a well or a pond to quench his thirst. After a long search, he came upon a spring. As he was taking a sip of water, he heard some loud laughter. He looked around for the source of the voices and saw some girls bathing in the river.

Among them was a very beautiful girl.

A few questions revealed that she was a princess of another

kingdom. The king, however, did not reveal his identity to the princess and her friends. When they came out of the water, he expressed his desire to marry the princess. She shyly replied, "You must speak to my father. Only he can decide what's good for me."

So the king reached her kingdom and approached her father. "I would like to marry your daughter," he told the old king. The father did not enquire about this suitor to his daughter's hand. He only wanted to know how he could earn his livelihood. "I can do good drawing and needlework," said the king. The old king was satisfied. Soon the princess and the king in disguise, were married. They returned to the king's palace.

Another day when the king went hunting, he stopped by at a village, which was being looted by a gang of dacoits. The dacoits did not recognise the king, who was in disguise. They took him hostage and made away with him to their den in the forest.

The king protested that he had no wealth to give them, but the dacoits were not convinced. A week passed. The dacoits fed and took care of the



king, although he insisted that he had no wealth to give away. At last the king suggested to the dacoits, "Get me some plain handkerchiefs and I'll embroider them. You may sell them in the palace. The queen is very fond of embroidered handkerchiefs and will surely buy them. You can keep the money that you make out of the sale."

The dacoits agreed. They looted all the cloth stores in the kingdom and brought many handkerchiefs for the king. He patiently embroidered them with floral designs and also included some words in the patterns. The illiterate dacoits could not make out the

words and they thought they, too, were part of the patterns. They took the kerchiefs for sale to the queen.

As soon as she saw them, she recognised her husband's handiwork. She also understood that her husband was trying to convey a message. She bought all the kerchiefs and by piecing the messages all together, she understood what had happened to him. She instructed her soldiers and at night, they found their way to the dacoits' den and freed their king. The dacoits were caught.





The Legends Behind Diwali

Lord Krishna, Rama, Kali, Mahabali, Yama, Indra: no, this is not a who's who of Indian mythology! This is just a list of the various Indian gods and goddesses and other mythological personalities who have been associated with that most exciting of Indian festivals: Diwali.

Diwali is celebrated all over India, in different ways. It is celebrated 20 days after Dussera, on Amavasya, the new moon day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashwin, which occurs in October or November every year. According to some Indian calendars, Diwali occurs in the month of Karthik.

finished.
✓ According to the *Ramayana*, when Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya with his consort Sita and brother Lakshmana after his fourteen-year exile in the forest, the people of Ayodhya lit lamps all over the kingdom to welcome them. We celebrate this homecoming of Rama as Diwali.



Diwali is celebrated for five days in North India. The festival begins two days before Amavasya. The first day is called **Dhan Teras**. On this day, people worship Dhanvantari, the physician of the Gods. Dhanvantari is said to have

come out of the Ocean when the devas and the asuras churned it for obtaining *amrit* or nectar.



Small story
This day is also called **Dhana Trayodashi** and in some communities, people light little lamps all over the house to ward off death. These lamps are called Yamadeep. It is said that long ago a young prince was destined to die of snake-bite four days after his marriage. His worried wife, who learns of it, lights many lamps all over the house and heaps all ornaments, gold and silver, at the threshold



of his room. She stays awake through the night, singing devotional songs and narrating stories. Legends say that Yama, the God of Death, who comes in the guise of a snake to snatch away her husband, is charmed by her singing and sits enthralled the whole night. In the morning he quietly goes away and the young prince is saved. Thus began the ritual of lighting Yamadeep on Dhan Tera



Naraka Chaturdashi, the second day of the festival, celebrates the slaying of Narakasura by Lord Krishna, after a fierce combat. Some call this day **Roop-Chaturdashi** as everybody takes a ritual bath on this day. This ritual bath is enhanced by the addition of herbs to the water.

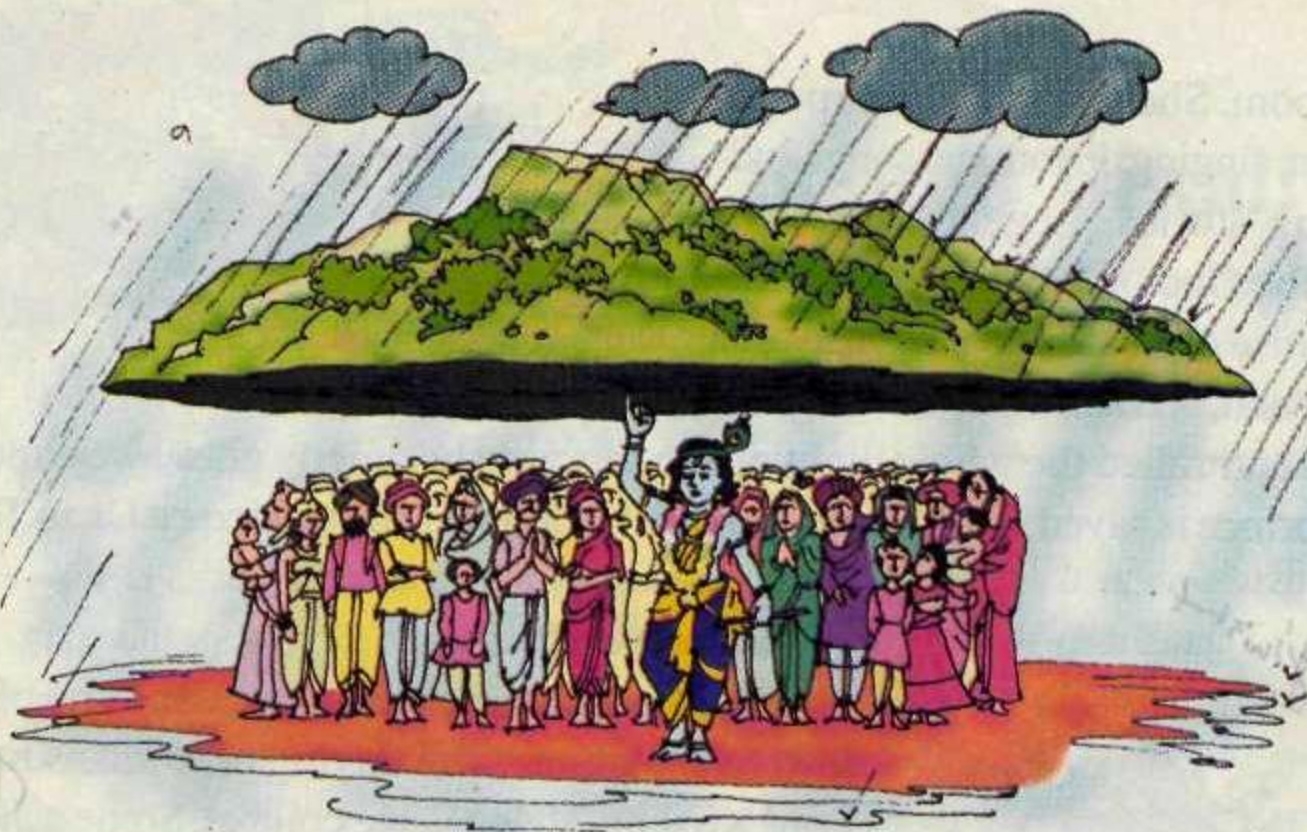


In Tamil Nadu, people rush to take a ritual bath before dawn breaks on Diwali Amavasya. This ritual oil-bath is also called *Ganga Snanam* as it is considered as auspicious as a dip in the holy Ganga. The ritual bath is followed by the wearing of new clothes. It is topped by eating sweets and also a dollop of a special, home-made sweet and spicy herbal medicine that is called '*lehyam*'.



The third day of Diwali, the Amavasya, is celebrated as **Lakshmi Puja** or **Chopada Puja** by the business communities of North India. Books of account are closed and new accounts are opened on this day. People clean up houses, wear new clothes, and buy new vessels on Diwali. Every house is decorated with *diyas* or lamps to welcome Lakshmi.





Govardhan Puja is yet another puja associated with Diwali. According to Hindu mythology, the people of Gokul used to pray to Lord Indra every year after the monsoon. But Lord Krishna advised them to worship the Govardhan mountain rather than Lord Indra. The Govardhan mountain near Gokul played an important role in the lives of the local people. When they stopped worshipping Indra, he was so enraged that he wanted to punish them. So he sent torrents of rain to Gokul. The whole city reeled under the rains. Houses were washed away. And then Lord Krishna came to everyone's rescue by holding up the Govardhan mountain on his little finger as an umbrella to shelter the people from the rains. And Govardhan Puja was introduced as an essential part of Diwali!



Bhai Dooj: an occasion that marks the mutual love of sisters and brothers. It is said that Yama, the God of Death, visited his sister Yami on this day. A thrilled Yami applied the auspicious tilak on his forehead and feted him. They exchanged special gifts as a token of their love for each other. From this follows the tradition of brothers visiting sisters on the fifth day of the Diwali festival.

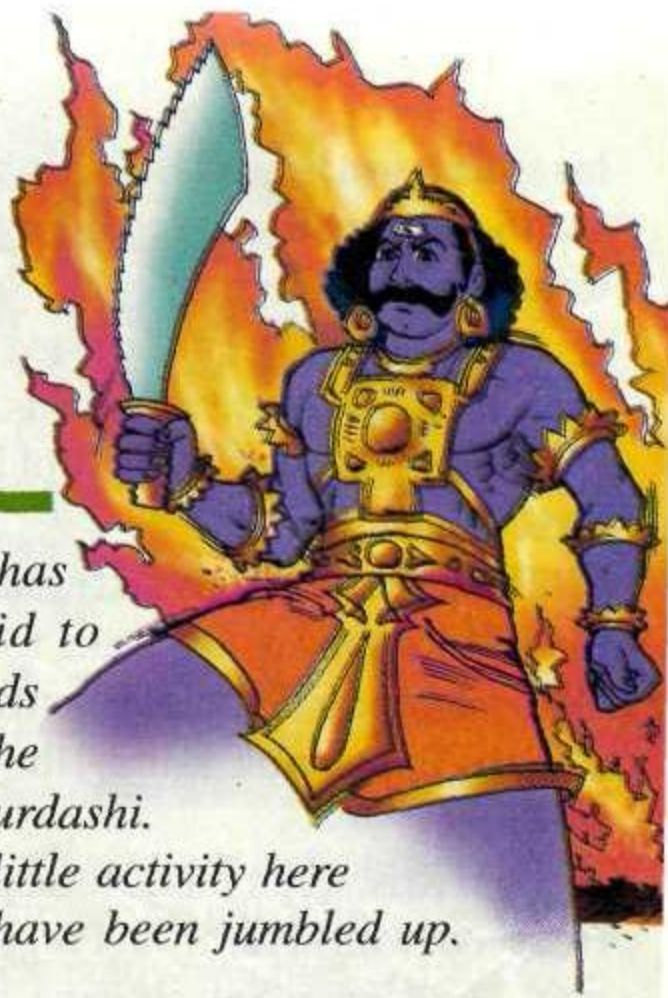


THE SLAYING OF NARAKASURA

(a traditional Diwali myth)

The tradition of lighting lamps on Diwali has special significance. Diwali is also said to celebrate the death of Narakasura at the hands of Lord Krishna. That is why the day before the Diwali Amavasya is called the Naraka-Chaturdashi.

As you read this story, do watch out for a little activity here and there. Some of the words of the story have been jumbled up. Check out if you can scramble them.



Narakasura was the son of the Lord Vishnu and Bhoodevi. At the time of his birth it was predicted that he would become either a great monarch or a vicious demon. His doting mother Bhoodevi naturally wanted him to be a great monarch and so she protected him from all evil influences.

However, one day, Sukracharya, the guru of the asuras, approached Naraka. "O Naraka," began the acharya. "You were born to be a protector of the asuras. Arise and understand your own destiny." And Naraka soon switched sides.

However, his ardent prayers to gods gave him tremendous power. At the request of his doting mother, Bhoodevi, Lord Vishnu

presented him with a weapon, the Narayanastra. And he was also granted a **onob** that no one but Lord Vishnu could kill him.

Now he became a threat to the peace of the gods and sages. He feared nobody. After all, had not the Lord given him the mighty Narayanastra?

One day, he entered the heavens and challenged Indra to a fight. He defeated Indra and his aides very easily. Excited by this **ctovryi**, the demon ran amok. He robbed the earrings of Indra's mother, Aditi. He also took away the royal white umbrella of Indra.

He seated himself on Indra's throne and unleashed a reign of terror. "Kill them! Crush them!" he commanded



his *ssarua* in a frenzy. He disturbed the sacrifices being conducted by sages and tortured all good men.

After running riot in the heavens and earth, the demon went back to his capital city, Pragjotishapura, the City of Lights, and continued to rule.

The distressed gods and *egsas* went to Lord Krishna at Dwaraka for help. "We cannot bear the humiliation brought on us by this terrible asura," they wept at His feet.

Lord Krishna promised to help them. He set out with his army to Pragjotishapura. His consort Satyabhama, herself a skilled warrior, accompanied him. Krishna and Satyabhama flew on their mount, Garuda, over the demon's capital city to study the city's layout and the

demon's preparedness. They realised that it was a well-fortified *icty*. Narakasura's commanders guarded the city gates.

Krishna and Satyabhama entered into a *bmctoa* with the asura forces. They killed all the commanders of Narakasura. The enraged demon came to the battlefield himself. Krishna suddenly fell unconscious when a missile hit him.

Satyabhama took over the mantle of the attack. Soon Krishna regained consciousness and joined her. Naraka picked up a *asrep* and aimed it at Krishna. But before he could hurl it, Krishna severed the head of Naraka with his discus, the Sudarshana. Krishna recovered the articles that Naraka had stolen from the gods. Krishna and Satyabhama returned to Dwaraka after restoring the articles to the respective gods.

Just before his death, Narakasura realised his follies and asked for a boon. "Oh Lord, may all people remember me once a year and *eelbcreat* the day of my death every year by lighting lamps, eating sweets, wearing new clothes and bursting crackers." And Krishna granted his wishes. And that's why we wear new clothes, eat sweets, and light lamps on Diwali.



Answers to the jumble:
Boon, victory, asuras, sages,
city, combat, spear, celebrate



My Most Eventful Diwali

I itch and twitch. We are nearing that time of the year. Diwali – the Festival of Lights. Time I was brought out from the steel trunk where I lie throughout the year. Time I got a wash and bright polish. Time for oil to be poured into my deep bowl and a wick to be soaked in it. Time to glow, bright and warm.

You must have guessed who I am. Yes, a brass lamp. I was fashioned by a craftsman at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, a city that is known for intricate brasswork. This was ten years back.

I am quite a tiny thing, and an ordinary *diya*. But you should see the beautiful motif all over me.

When I was off-loaded at a showroom, I was grabbed by the first customer who saw me. This was Shakuntala *mami*. She gifted me with an assortment of other brass lamps of different sizes to her neighbour, Urmila, when the girl got married.

I entered the Sharma family along with Urmila ten years back. And I've been with them since. I still remember the first Diwali I spent with this family. I

remember Urmila as a young bride, clad in a shimmering silk saree, the *pallu* draped elegantly over her head, her face aglow in my flickering light. I was placed at the threshold of the house, the only brass lamp to be put there. All around me were earthen *diyas*. Bigger silver lamps adorned the room where the family deities were kept.

The Sharmas are a well-to-do family and they have this craze for lamps. Every holiday, they would spend a few days touring different parts of the country. And wherever they went, they would collect lamps typical of that place.

You can imagine the number of lamps in the house. There were terracotta lamps from Bengal, the famous tall '*kutthuvillakku*' of Tamil Nadu, the *Kamakshi-villakku*, lamps with the figure of goddess Kamakshi etched on them, the black clay lamps of Karnataka, the heavy brass Guruvayur lamps of Kerala, the very tiny, filigreed silver *diyas* of Maharashtra, and several kinds of Arati and Archana lamps ... whew!



Lamps, you know, play a vital role in worship all over India. In ancient times, they were also used to send warriors to the battlefield, and to welcome back victorious armies.

Hey, have you heard of lamp dances? In Punjab, the *jago* is a lamp dance performed during marriages, and in Gujarat the graceful *garba* is a lamp dance.

Shakuntala *mami*, Urmila's old friend, used to prepare two cute lamps out of powdered rice and jaggery, fill them with ghee and light them on the four Fridays



of the month of *Ashada*. It seems that this is a customary practice in this state.

To get back to my story. Everyone in the house loved lamps, except one member: this was Jimmy, the pet Alsatian. He hated Diwali and would howl and howl at the sight of so many lamps being lit! And we lamps dreaded his very sight. He has stamped out and broken many an earthen *diya*.

Today is Diwali. Urmila's daughters, Neha and Nita, are excited. So, too, is Jimmy. He runs all over the place, howling as Urmila, now a comfortably plump mother, lights the many lamps in the house. As the flame flickers, I feel the old flush of excitement ripple through me.

She takes me on her shining tray full of lamps. Jimmy is jumping at her elbow all along and this makes me jittery. The earthen lamps are lined along the balcony and all along the compound walls of the house. Then many little lamps are placed all over the *rangoli* on the threshold.

I am the only lamp on her tray now. As she lifts me off the tray carefully, Jimmy's paw clutches her hand and oh no! I fall off her hand. Oh no! The burning wick falls out of me, heading for Urmila's feet. I'm shocked. Am I going to be responsible for a fire accident? I fall on the ground and the oil spills out. But I am terrified. What will happen to Urmila?

Mercifully, before anything happens, Jimmy leaps again and diverts the course of the burning wick. It falls on his foot and he yelps piteously in pain. By now, Urmila regains her balance and puts out the wick with her foot. Jimmy is saved, except for some burns. I breathe in relief. This Diwali Jimmy finally has won a place in my heart. He is a silly fellow, I decide, but not a bad sort after all.

Now we really are one big happy family!





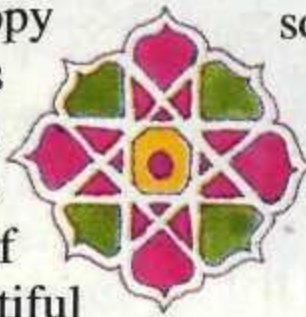
Lakshmi and the washerwoman

Once there was this king of a wealthy kingdom. He was deeply in love with his queen who, needless to say, was very beautiful. So, this rich king and his beautiful queen were very happy together. One day, the king was idly looking at some gems that a trader had brought, when he was struck by the happy idea of having them set into a beautiful necklace for his charming queen.

The best jewellers in the land were summoned. They were asked to submit their most exquisite designs, and to do their very best. Money was of no consequence. On her next birthday the king wanted to present his queen with the best necklace in the world. After many days of discussion, the gems and

the design were chosen and the necklace ordered. When it was finished, the necklace was looked really lovely. The gems sparkled and the gold glowed softly. It had finally cost the king a near fortune. The queen was thrilled. She loved the necklace so much that she wore it all the time.

Near the palace flowed a winding river. Every day the queen would go down to the river to take a bath. One day as usual, she and her companions left their clothes and jewellery on the banks of the river and stepped into the river for their bath. The sparkling necklace that lay on the clothes caught the eye of a kite that was flying past. The kite picked up the necklace



and flew away with it before anyone could do anything.

As you can imagine, there was a big hue and cry. The queen was inconsolable. The king announced that the finder would be awarded anything he wanted. The market place buzzed with the news of the loss and the reward. People gathered in street corners to discuss the incident and wondered where the necklace could be.

Except one poor and lonely old washerwoman who lived by herself in a dark, dingy hut far away from the palace. She did not have enough to eat and could barely keep her place clean. That day as the kite was flying away with the necklace, she had just killed a lizard and thrown it on the roof of her thatched hut. The kite, deciding that the lizard was a better thing than the necklace, as it was food, dropped the necklace and picked up the lizard.

The old lady heard the thud as the kite dropped the necklace on the roof and went out to see what it was. She saw something glittering there and brought it down. As soon as she saw

the necklace, she knew that it must belong to the palace. When she went to the market to sell the bits of wood that she had gathered from the forest, she got to know about the loss of the queen's necklace and the reward announced by the king.

The old lady wrapped the necklace carefully in a piece of rag that she had and tucked it into her waist. She then went to the palace and asked for an audience with the king. The king had given orders that anyone who wanted to see him should be allowed in. So the old lady was promptly taken to the king.

"I hear you have lost a valuable necklace," said the old lady.

"Yes," said the king hopefully.

"Will you stand by your promise of allowing the finder to ask for anything in reward?" asked the woman.

"Yes," said the king, just a little less eagerly, wondering what the old lady was going to ask.

"I have it here," said the old lady and brought the necklace out from the folds of her sari and gave it to him. She told him how she had come upon it. Then she said, "Now you have to give me what I ask for."



The king waited with some misgivings, not sure how much wealth or riches she wanted. All the people present in the court also went absolutely quiet, waiting to hear what the old lady would say. The old lady, however, did not want wealth or land or anything of the kind. Can you guess what she asked for?

She said, "Your Majesty, it will be Diwali in a few days. This Diwali I want you to order all your subjects, except me, not to light any lamps. There should be no lamps lit in the palace as well. That is all I ask."

The king was simply stunned by this odd request. But he was also relieved. He did not really want to give away any part of his wealth even to a poor, old lady. He would much rather have given his queen another necklace. Anyway, the king gave orders just as the old lady wanted. That Diwali, in the particular kingdom, there was only one lamp twinkling in all that darkness, and that was in the old lady's hut.

At the stroke of midnight, goddess Lakshmi came down to Earth and to that kingdom, but she found the place in complete darkness. She was greatly distressed, and as she looked around,

she found only one house with a lamp. So she quickly went to that house and knocked on the door. The old lady was immersed in her puja and asked rather severely, "Who is there now?"

"Please let me in. The complete darkness outside frightens me," said Lakshmi, who likes to visit only clean and bright places.

"And who might you be?" demanded the old lady.

"I'm goddess Lakshmi. I have come from heaven to enjoy Diwali. Only this year I'm not enjoying it at all. Everything is so dark and dingy," the goddess complained.

"You haven't bothered to visit me all these years during Diwali. Why should I let you in now?" demanded the old lady. "In fact, I don't think I will."

But Lakshmi pleaded and begged, and finally the old lady relented. She said, "I'll let you in if you promise never to leave my house again," the old lady said.

Goddess Lakshmi promised and came into the hut lighting it up with her glow. Ever after that, the old lady was never in want because Lakshmi did not forsake her.





A Dream for Diwali

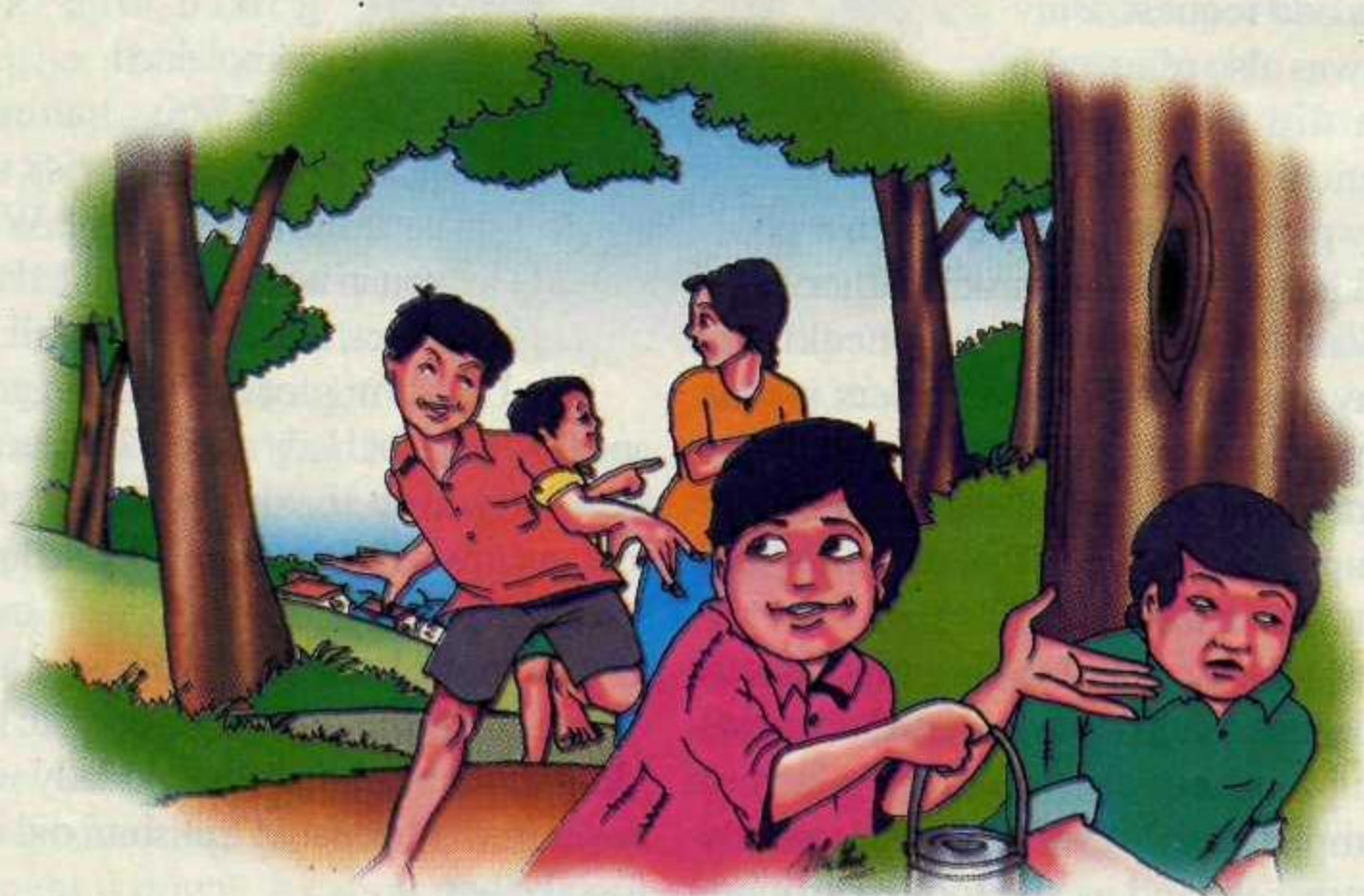


It was dawn. The sun was rising in the horizon, bathing the sky in streaks of golden yellow. The children of Amanpur village were already on their way to Phatakapur. Seth Roshan Singh had a fireworks-producing factory there. He was, however, based in London and had a few more businesses to look after. The Phatakapur factory was looked after by a miserly manager, who underpaid the young workers and kept the rest of the money himself. Everyone was afraid of this ruthless manager-Brijmohan saheb.

This is where the children of Amanpur - Mohan, Kittu, Seeta, Pandhari and Afzal - worked from

morning to evening. All of them were between 7 and 11 years old. The poor villagers had no option but to send their children to work in order to make both ends meet. Since Phatakapur was far away from Amanpur, the children left the village early to reach on time. Brij saheb was always looking out for opportunities to cut their wages and make them work overtime.

Afzal, as usual, was daydreaming as they walked. He wanted to give his ailing mother and four year old brother a Diwali they could remember. They had passed through very tough times during the last one year, after his father died in a road accident. Even Id had been very



gloomy with no money for sweets or gifts.

Mohan and Kittu were singing loudly, each trying to be louder than the other. Seeta was busy eating the wild berries she had picked on the way. Pandhari was trying to imitate the calls of different birds.

They reached the factory on time and went straight to their work sheds. There were about 50-60 children from nearby villages working in this factory.

As he worked, Afzal's fingers got badly bruised by the chemical he was handling. They had been provided with safety gloves in the beginning of the year, but these had worn out with use. Brij saheb had not replaced them.

Unable to stand the pain, Afzal decided to take a break and went to the door. He heard the phone ring and Brij saheb came rushing to take the call.

"Hello, who is it?" he shouted rudely into the phone. All of a sudden he broke into smiles and his tone became soft and respectful. "Good morning, Roshan sethji. Yes, everything is fine here. Yes, yes, I have increased their wages; the workers are very happy. I shall send you the accounts tomorrow along with the notebook. There is no need for you to waste your time visiting Phatakapur.

Okay, sethji, I shall let you know if there are any problems!"

Afzal was still standing at the door and he understood what was happening. He quickly darted out of Brij saheb's sight.

On their way back to the village later, Afzal was busy thinking. He could guess that Roshan seth was a good man and was unaware of the state of affairs in the Phatakapur factory. He had to somehow communicate the truth to sethji.



He decided to take Seeta into confidence. She was 11 years old, older than him by a year. She had even attended school for two years but had to drop out, like the rest of them, to start working.

At his behest, Seeta wrote to sethji, requesting him to visit their factory soon. Afzal signed it. As per their plan, Seeta was to come in a little late the next day. When Brij saheb would be busy shouting at her, Afzal would enter saheb's room, look for the accounts notebook that he would send to sethji and slip the letter into it.

The next morning, Seeta stopped a little before the factory as the other children filed past. Brij saheb seemed to be in a foul mood. He stopped Kittu and roared, "Where is the girl?"

Kittu gaped but Afzal shouted from behind, "She woke up late today." All of them hurried to work. Afzal waited for the right time and hurried to the room. He saw a bright notebook on the table.

"This must be the book of accounts saheb will send to sethji," he thought to himself as he pushed the small letter into it. The rest of the day was spent in fear and hope that it was the right notebook. As they were leaving in the evening, Afzal took a peep into the room and was shocked to see a pile of similar notebooks on the table. Did he make a mistake? If the letter fell into saheb's hands, it would be the end of his job here.

A month passed and Afzal spent each day in fear. Would the letter fall into saheb's hand?

Then one day, all the workers were surprised to see a beautiful car parked outside the factory. Before they could enter the gate, Brij saheb came running out and told them to go behind the factory. He looked upset and scared.

"I want all the children to go back today, understand? Roshan sethji has come and is very angry with your work. And most important, if you all want your job, tell him that Brij saheb takes good care of you. Don't forget..."

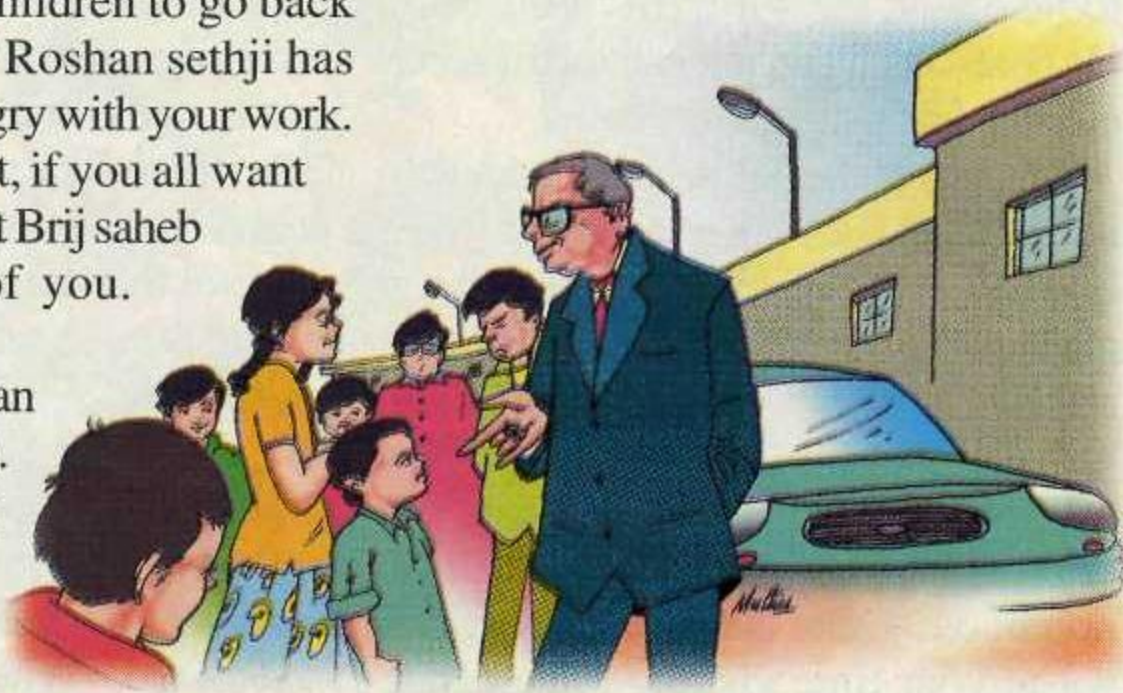
Suddenly Roshan sethji walked in. "What is happening here? And yes, what are the children doing

here? Why are they not at school? And yes, who is this Afzal? I would like to speak to him."

Someone pointed towards Afzal. "Come here, sonny," said sethji gently. "I won't hurt you. Oh! Your fingers are badly burnt. What happened?" All the children came forward and showed their bruised hands. One look at Brij, and Roshan seth understood everything. "So this is how you have been treating the people of my ancestral home?" he thundered. Brij saheb stood there hanging his head in shame. He knew that he would have to pack his bags soon.

Roshan seth apologised to all of them for his negligence. He announced that all the children working in the factory would be admitted to schools and that he would pay their fees. He distributed sweet packets and crackers among the children. A new hope dawned in their hearts. Afzal thanked Allah for everything and started dreaming of the great Diwali he would give his family.

By K.C. Nithya



A story from China

How Yuanhsiao went home

Once, many years ago, an emperor called Wu Di ruled China. In his palace there was a maid named Yuanhsiao. She worked in the palace all the days of the month all through the year. She had no holidays at all. As you can imagine, she longed to go home to meet her family, but the rule was that servants could not leave the palace and this rule was strictly enforced.

Yuanhsiao had a friend in the palace called Dongfang Shuo. He was a minister. He was someone who could talk to the emperor. Yuanhsiao often met Dongfang Shuo to talk about things. Sometimes, she would give him moon cakes that she made. Dongfang Shuo loved those cakes.

One day, Yuanhsiao told Dongfang Shuo about her desire to see her family. Dongfang Shuo felt really sorry for the homesick maid and thought he would try and help her. Now



Dongfang Shuo was a wily man, so he thought up a clever scheme.

Dongfang Shuo went to the emperor and told him that the God of Heaven had asked God of Fire to destroy the city on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, at the end of the New Year celebrations.

The emperor asked him what they should do.

"We should get everyone to help save the city from the Fire God. Everyone should get together with their families to light red lanterns and set off as many



firecrackers as they can all night long. This will please and appease the Fire God and he won't harm us," said the cunning minister.

Dongfang Shuo also suggested that the Fire God should be presented with moon cakes, or dumplings, which he liked very much. Now Yuanhsiao's moon cakes were famous and she was asked to make a lot of them for the festival. The emperor gave orders that everyone should prepare for the festival exactly as Dongfang Shuo had suggested.

The whole city had a grand time that night, letting off crackers and lighting lanterns and eating moon cakes. And, of course, the city was unharmed. Thus it was that Yuanhsiao was able to go home to see her family.

The emperor enjoyed the show so much that he ordered that they should hang red lanterns and let off firecrackers every year at the same time. So, it became a celebration every year when people would go back home to their families and celebrate the end of the New Year with a grand Lantern Festival.

The Chinese celebrate the Lunar New Year, also called the Spring Festival, for a number of days. For about twenty days

before the New Year, they prepare for the New Year by clearing out the junk and garbage from their houses. Then they clean and decorate their houses. All the household vessels are washed and new clothes are bought for everyone.

The day before New Year, housewives do all their cleaning and



sweeping, for it is considered bad luck to sweep the house on New Year day as good luck could also be swept away along with the dirt.

Food is very important during the festivities. A lot of delectable dishes are made and bought during this month. People eat a rice dish with eight meat

dishes and vegetables called Eight Treasure rice. On New Year's eve, everyone tries to be home and there is a grand feast to celebrate the New Year. Children collect little red envelopes of money from their parents and other elders in the family.

At night, beautiful red lanterns are lit and the whole family lets off firecrackers to frighten evil spirits and usher in the New Year. The next day, people visit friends and wish each other for the New Year. At this time, the people also settle their accounts so that they can start the New Year with a clean slate (as businessmen in some parts of India do during Diwali).

On the fifteenth day after New Year

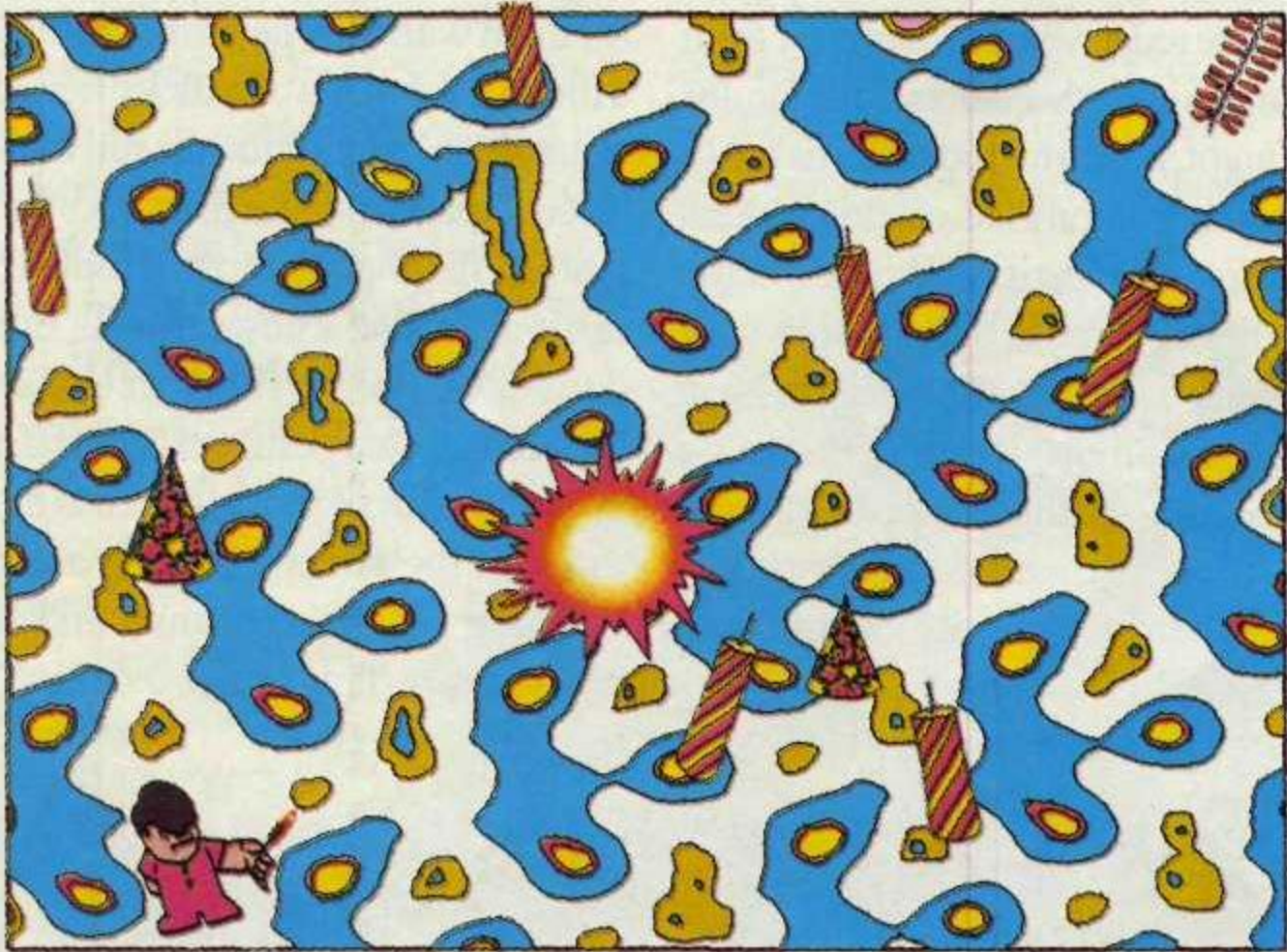


is the Lantern Festival. The Chinese believe that on this night, the first full moon of the New Year, heavenly beings can be seen flying in the sky. So they look for them with their lanterns. On this day, a moon cake made of a sticky rice called 'yuanshiao', signifying the full moon, is eaten. Apart from the fireworks and the lantern display at most temples, this festival is also known for its dragon dance. A colourful procession of hundred feet long dragons, with flashing eyes and swaying bodies, wends its way through the streets, accompanied by clashing cymbals, drums, and brass instruments. This brings the New Year festivities to a close.



A - MAZ - ING!

Can you help that naughty little fellow reach the cracker at the other corner. Remember that he has to avoid the explosion in the middle of the maze.



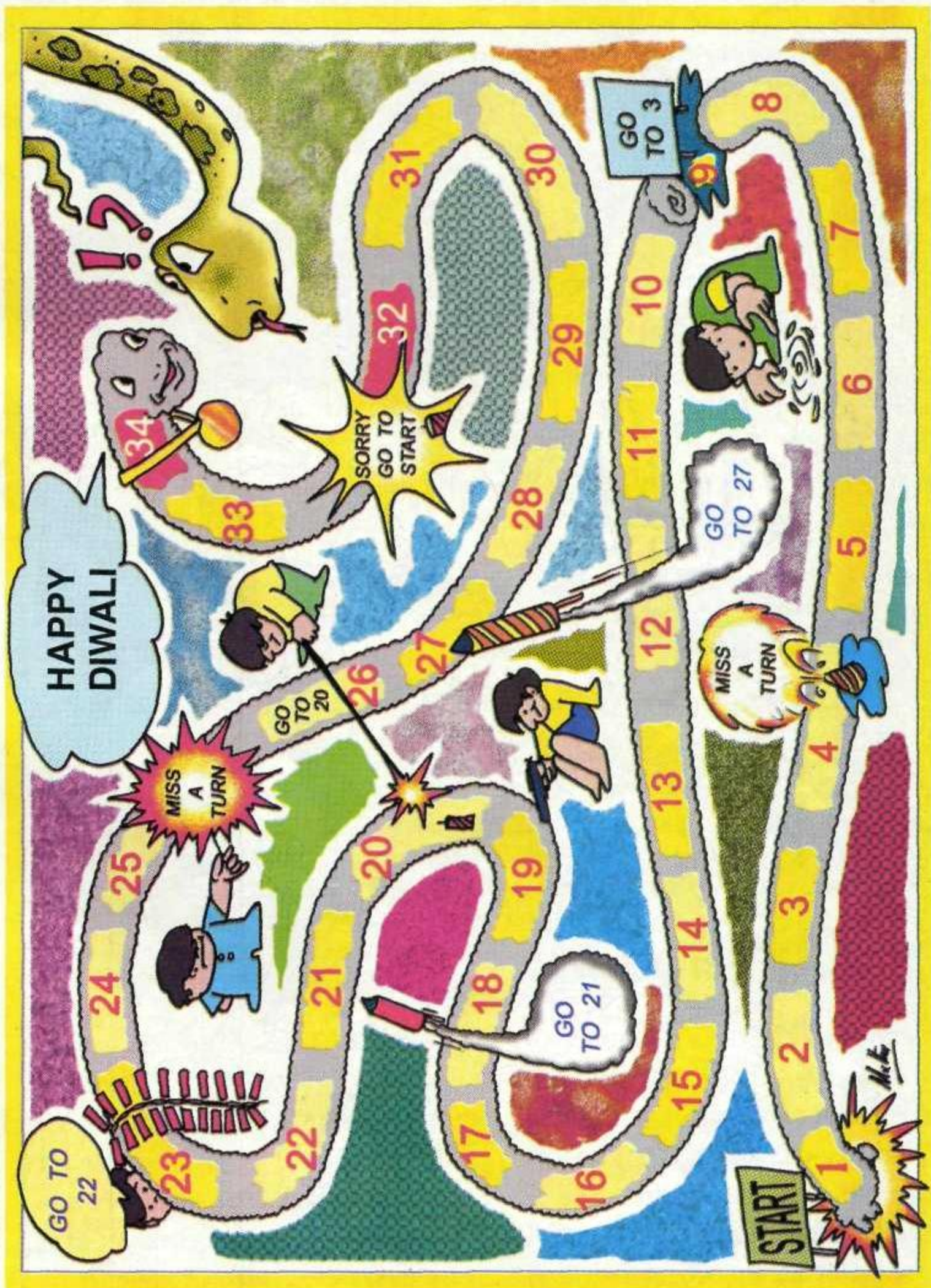
Did You Know?

- ◆ The Vikram Samvat calendar begins on the day of Diwali. This calendar began in 58 B.C. According to some historians, it marks the coronation of a great Indian king Vikram, who ruled in Central and North India. In parts of North India, where the Vikram era is followed, people celebrate Diwali as New Year.
- ◆ Mahavira, the founder of the Jain religion, is believed to have departed for his heavenly abode on the day of Diwali. On this day Jains distribute sweets, light lamps all around their houses and recite the scriptures. Mahavira is worshipped at midnight on Diwali and early next morning.
- ◆ In West Bengal, Diwali coincides with another important local festival: the Kali or Shyama Puja, the worship of a fiercer version of goddess Durga.



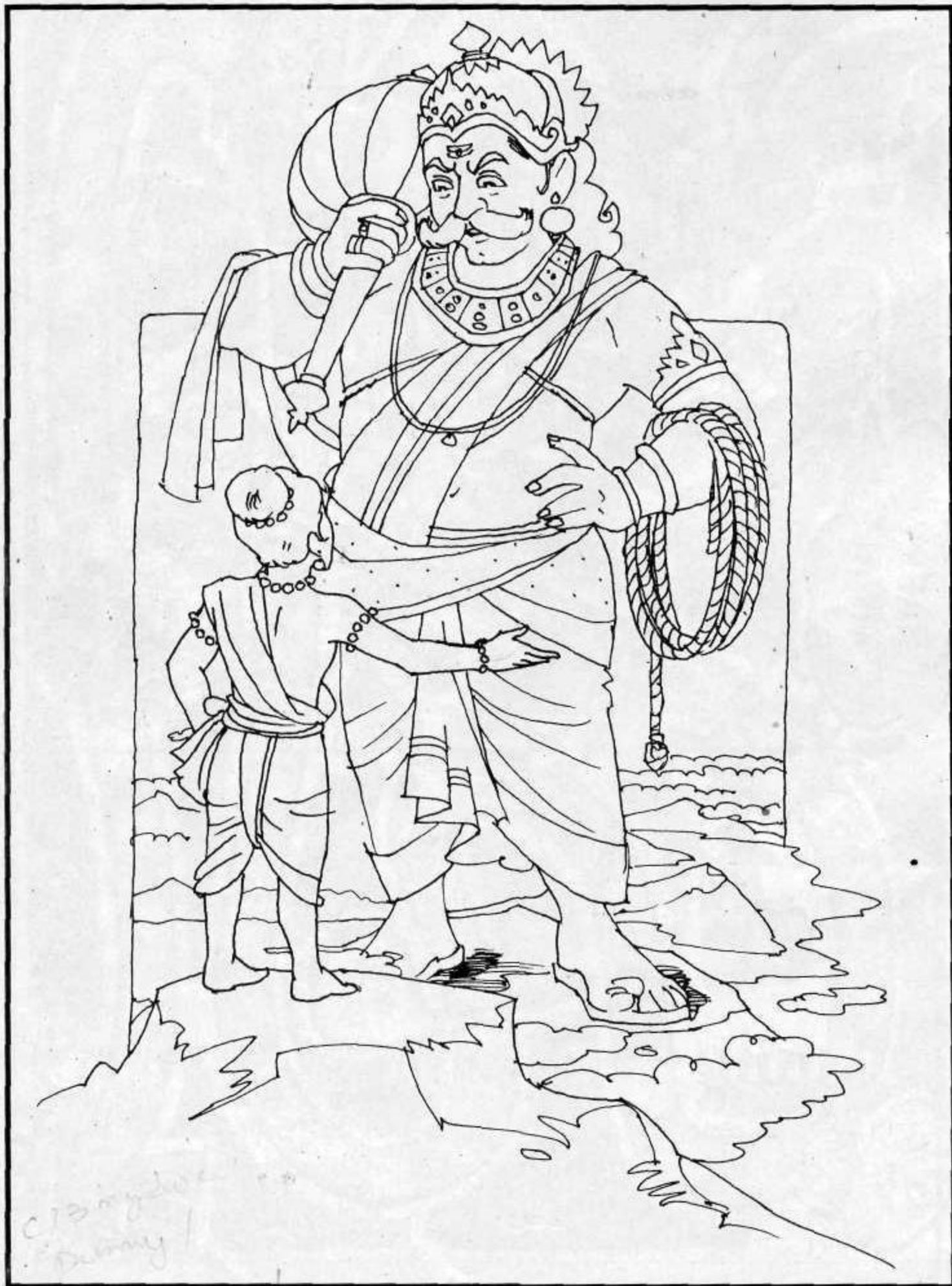
DIWALI DAZZLER

Here is a game for two or more persons. To start, you need a 'six' on your dice. Move your counter along the path, following the instructions given. So get rolling.



COLOURING FUN

Little Nachiketa quizzes the great God of Death, Yama, on the mysteries of life and death. It is said that this brilliant dialogue between Nachiketa and Yama took place during Diwali. Won't you add sparkle to the scene by colouring it? Go on, reach for those colours!





THE GOLDEN THRONE

(The story so far : The kingdom of Kaundinya is agog with the prospect of Prince Vijayadatta ascending the golden throne, which has been dug out from the precincts of the palace. As he starts climbing the steps, the three figurines on the steps come alive and pose questions which he has to answer. Only when they are satisfied can he go up and occupy the seat. The first two damsels are happy with his answers. The third tells him the story of King Nyayavardhana, well known for the way he dispenses justice. Prince Kumarasetu of the neighbouring kingdom, who has come to learn law and justice, watches the king listening to the petitioners and to those against whom they have brought complaints, and giving his decisions and directions. Vijayadatta has now to give his own analysis to the figurine. Read on...)

Kumarasetu had listened with great care and interest to the day's proceedings at the royal court. He was mulling over the king's decisions in his mind and was somewhat preoccupied as he walked in the palace gardens.

At night King Nyayavardhana sent

for Kumarasetu and spoke to him with great affection. "Son, you listened to the people's appeals today with great attention and understanding. I would like to say something about the matter. Ratnagupta is a prominent citizen and businessman of our state. He has an only



son called Hemagupta. Unfortunately, the youngster is a gambler and drunkard and an incorrigible scoundrel. Whatever the father earns in a week, the son loses in an hour. He is a real wastrel. Now I am keen to know what you thought of the day's hearings."

When Kumarasetu heard Nyayavaradhana's words, he looked pleased and relieved.

The third damsel stopped her narration there and asked Vijayadatta: "Prince, are you equally well versed in law and justice as Nyayavardhana? Do you have as much knowledge? If indeed you can throw light on Nyayavardhana's decisions and why he decided the appeals the way he did,

then you can ascend this wonderful golden throne, the creation of Pulind Bhattarak. Not only that, you'll also win the magic sword *Chandrahast* made by him. If not, then I'm afraid this throne will disappear on wings of light before your very eyes. Then all the efforts you took till now would go waste! So, Vijayadatta, try hard and may you succeed."

Vijayadutta, who had been listening carefully to the damsel, said at once: "O image of Justice, I would not like to comment on my knowledge or competence. Let me answer the question you have put to me and let others judge me and my ability."

Then he said: "All men can be divided into three types, the bright, the average, and the stupid. The king has to decide to which type the petitioner and the accused before him belong and then mete out justice accordingly. The king has to use his understanding and deep knowledge to decide that. The better the king understands the nature of persons brought to him, the better will be the quality of justice he imparts.

"The bright or the best kind of person will respond to a minor reprimand and will not make the same mistake twice. He will understand even from a small hint. The average kind of person needs to have things explained to him



clearly and he will learn from a mild punishment. The stupid, however, have to be warned, threatened, and frightened as they have no understanding at all.

"Besides understanding the psychology of the persons brought before him, a king must also know all about the prominent citizens of his state and must have a network of informers who will keep him informed of their status and lifestyles.

"Chandra was the first petitioner whom Nyayavardhana listened to. He was an average kind of person, and the king dealt with him accordingly. He explained to him his mistakes and spelt out the solution.

"Ratnagupta was a well-known trader of his land and a prominent citizen. The king dealt with him so delicately that even Manikarna was unable to decide whether the king had taken him to be really guilty or not. The king knew that Ratnagupta was a trustworthy and honourable trader. In fact, when Manikarna went round and enquired in

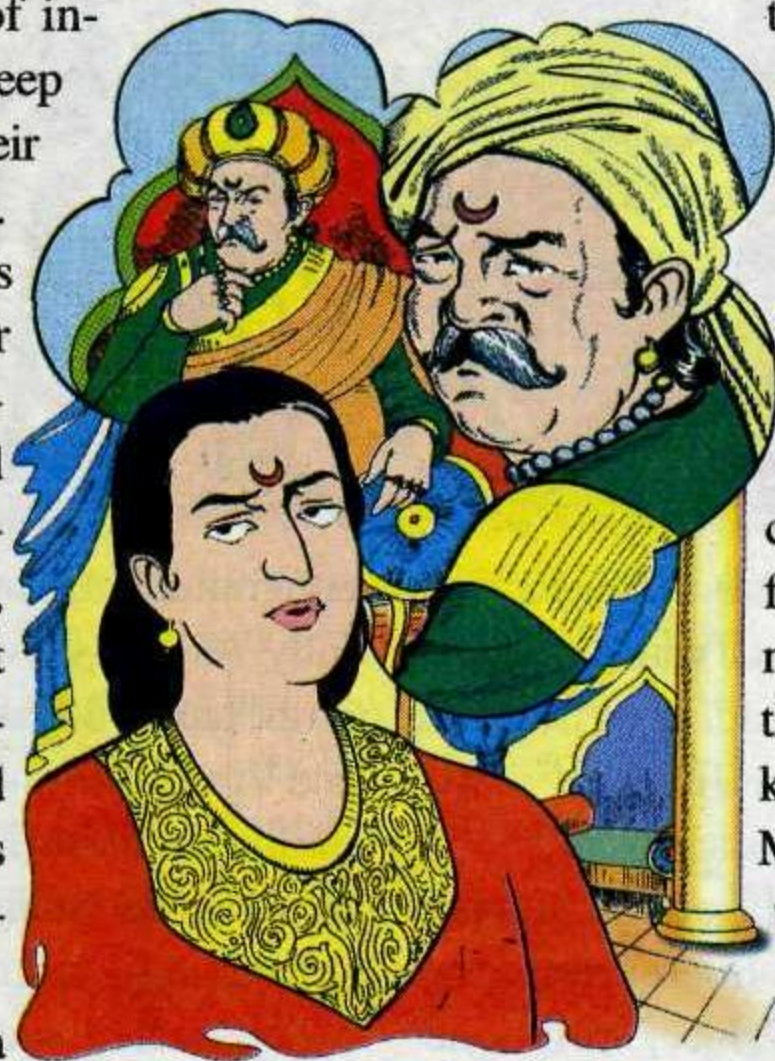
the market, he found that the people had a very good opinion of Ratnagupta. That reputation had been built over many years of honest trading. Yet the king knew that because of his son, Ratnagupta might have been tempted to cheat the trader hailing from another land thinking he could get away with it. When

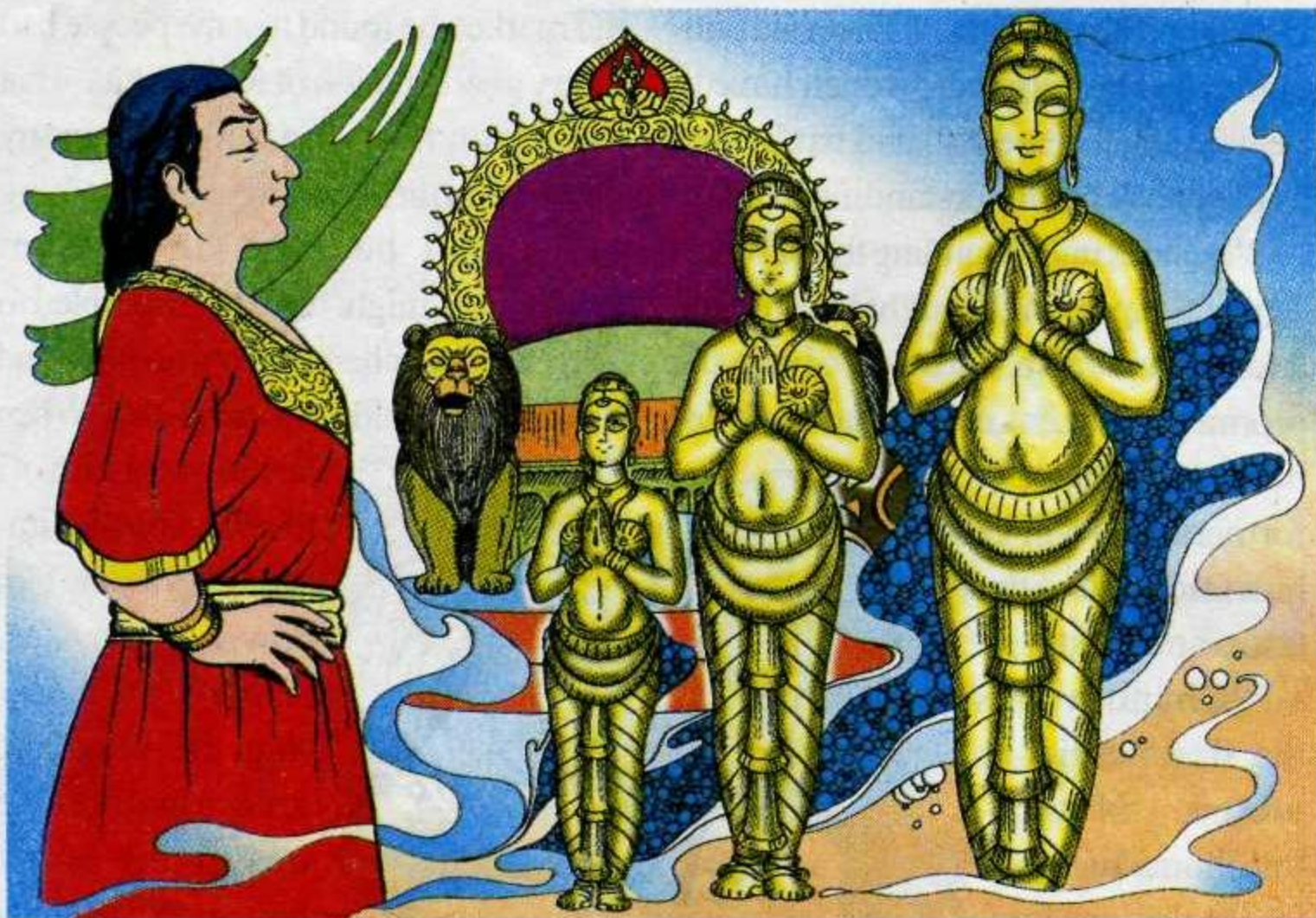
the king sent him off to reflect on the situation after asking him how his son was, Ratnagupta knew that the king had known the truth and was giving him a chance to save his face. He did not humiliate Ratnagupta in the open court. The king asked Manikarna to come the next day to confirm that Ratnagupta had returned the

goods to him. Ratnagupta was

warned and knew that this was why the king had sent him away with Manikarna. The warning as well as the fact the king was aware of everything was punishment enough for Ratnagupta. He would never do anything like this again.

"Now, the third case. The old woman was foolish and stubborn. She





was not willing to listen to reason and, therefore, the king dealt with her accordingly. This is my reading of the three cases, O spirit of Justice.” Thus Vijayadutta ended his analysis.

As soon as Vijayadutta stopped speaking, the third damsel expressed her joy: “Well done, Prince, well done! You’re the kind of man Pulind Bhattarak had in mind when he made the throne. You’re the realisation of that famous magician’s imagination. You’re indeed fit to ascend this throne. Please take your seat on it. You’ll rule for many years and become famous as Emperor Purusatva the Second.”

Then all the three images blessed and

congratulated Prince Vijayadatta joyfully. As they showered their blessings on the prince, the hall rang with applause, and Vijayadatta finally seated himself on the throne. Immediately the lotus bud at the feet of the family deity, Gayatri, blossomed, and in the middle there appeared a bejewelled scabbard. It held the sword *Chandrahast*.

Vijayadatta touched the goddess’s feet and then took the sword in his hand. Amidst the chanting of *mantras*, Vijayadatta ascended the golden throne.

That night a sudden sound awoke the old king Sridatta. There was a pigeon at the window. The king pulled the

bird in and untied the message attached to its legs.

“Our blessings and good wishes to the lord of the Golden Throne”, said the message. It was from King Madhavsena and Queen Vasumati, Vijayadatta’s parents-in-law.

Sridatta was very happy to read the message. He showed it to his son Vijayadatta and his wife Princess Srilekha.

A few days later, as planned, the armies of Kalindi, Champak and Kunda attacked Kaundinya. The army from Kalindi, which Madhavsena ruled, however, did not actually attack Kaundinya. Instead, it attacked the army of Champak. This act created confusion in the midst of the attacking armies. Vijayadatta, on seeing the help Madhavsena was giving him, took his new sword and fought fiercely. By nightfall, the Champak army was defeated,

while Kunda conceded defeat. The King of Champak, Maralabhupathi and son Chakrabhupati were taken prisoners. It was a complete victory for Vijayadatta.

Madhavsena now went up to Vijayadatta and asked for forgiveness from his son-in-law for having conspired against him. Vijayadatta, generous in victory, said: “Let bygones be bygones. At least now you’ll agree that this kingdom is also yours.”

Vijayadatta became the king of all the three large kingdoms of Champak, Kunda and Kalindi. Soon, all the smaller kingdoms in and around the area also accepted his overlordship. Vijayadatta then recovered all the areas that his ancestors had ruled at one time and, true to the prophecy of the three figurines on the steps to the golden throne, became a great emperor.

(Concluded)



A horse's egg!

Among the entries received for the CREATIVE CONTEST (July 2000), the one sent by G. Shashi Kanth (15 years - Class X) of Guddinnaram, Hyderabad, has been chosen for a cash prize of Rs. 100. His entry appears below, in italics. - Editor

One generally takes all gurus of yore to be a serious lot. But there was an exception; this guru enjoyed fun, and he had some funny disciples, too. They were so considerate that they were sad he had to use his legs for going from one place to another. "No, we must not allow him to walk!" said one. The others readily supported him. "We should carry him on our shoulders," suggested one. "But he's too old to keep balance, and it'll be scandalous if he were to tumble down," cautioned a disciple. "All right, then, why not we get him a horse?" That suggestion came after some hard thinking. "That's a grand idea, but let's take our guru's advice," said one disciple, some wisdom dawning on him. Luckily for them, the guru liked the idea. "See if you can get a good horse," said the guru. On the way to the market, they saw some horses by the side of the lake. At the market, they found out the prices of horses. They were taken aback. "That's a fat lot of money!" one of them remarked. "I've an idea," butted in another disciple. "Why not we buy a horse-egg and warm it up for the colt to come out?" There was all round appreciation. When they presented the latest proposal to the guru, he said: "I'm glad you've inherited a bit of my wisdom!"

The disciples went to the market and asked the owner of the horses for a horse egg. He had a good laugh at their foolishness and decided to fool them. He told them that they could try with his friend, Ram Singh, who owned a poultry farm.

The youngsters then went to Ram Singh and told him of the purpose of their visit. Taking advantage of their innocence, he gave them a hen's egg. The disciples felt elated of their wisdom and gave him a silver coin and returned to their ashram.

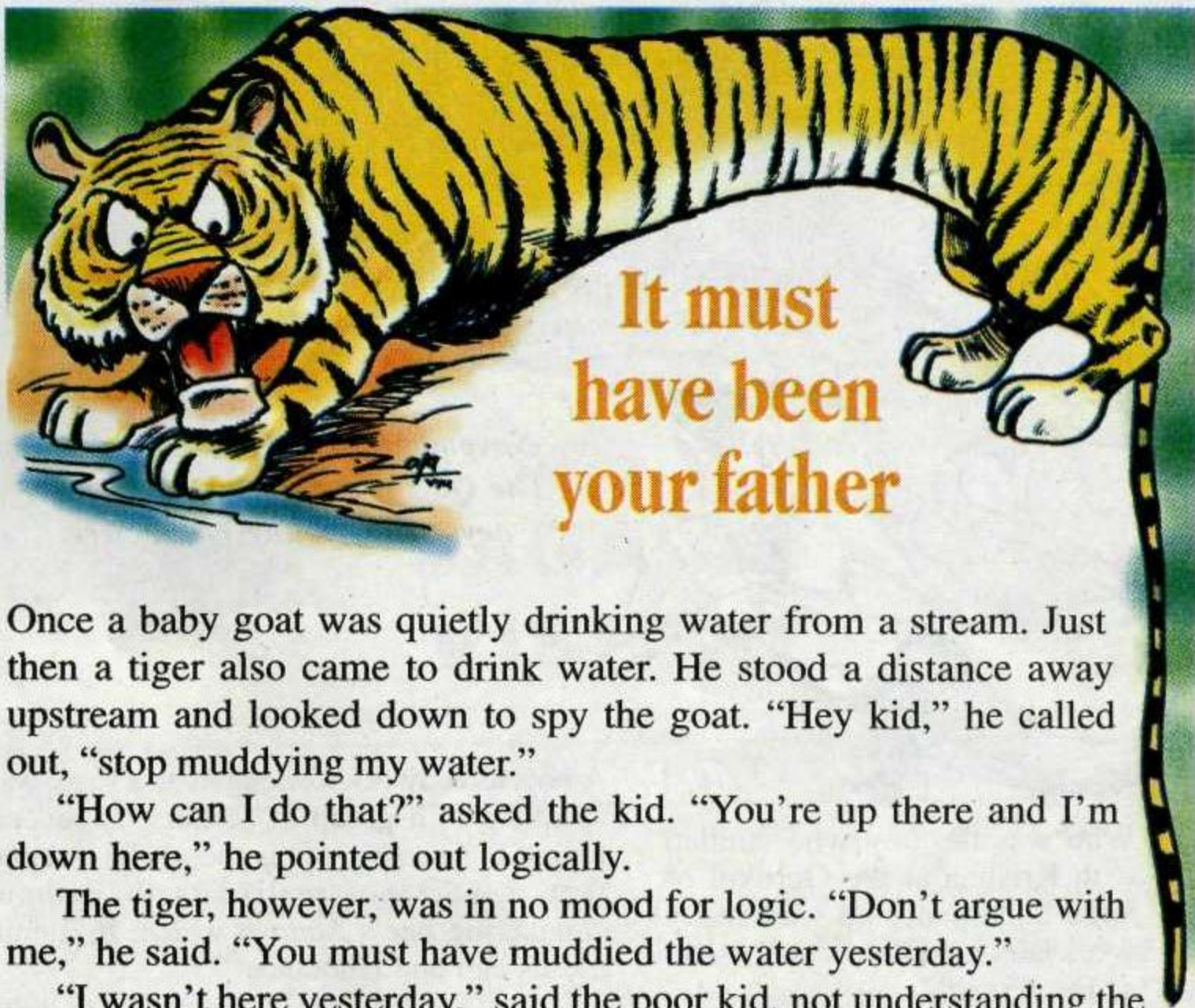
One of them suggested that they should light a fire and keep the egg near it for it to hatch. The village chief happened to pass by when he saw them keeping the egg near the fire. He told them that it would hatch only if a hen were to sit on it.

Following the village chief's advice, they went and bought a hen and made it sit on the egg. They patiently waited for the egg to hatch and the colt to come out. A few days later, the egg cracked open and a chick came out.

Realising that they had been fooled, they ran to their guru and narrated the whole episode. The guru explained to them thus : "My children, I am very happy to find that you do not want me to strain myself; but I wished that you learnt a lesson. So, I didn't stop you in your foolish pursuit. In fact, a horse doesn't give eggs at all. It only gives birth to young ones."

After listening to their guru, the disciples felt ashamed of themselves. Their purpose was laudable, but the method they chose was foolish.





**It must
have been
your father**

Once a baby goat was quietly drinking water from a stream. Just then a tiger also came to drink water. He stood a distance away upstream and looked down to spy the goat. "Hey kid," he called out, "stop muddying my water."

"How can I do that?" asked the kid. "You're up there and I'm down here," he pointed out logically.

The tiger, however, was in no mood for logic. "Don't argue with me," he said. "You must have muddied the water yesterday."

"I wasn't here yesterday," said the poor kid, not understanding the tiger at all.

"Well if it wasn't you, it must have been your father," said the tiger pursuing his own logic.

"B-b-but," bleated the kid, getting quite alarmed now, "I don't even know my father."

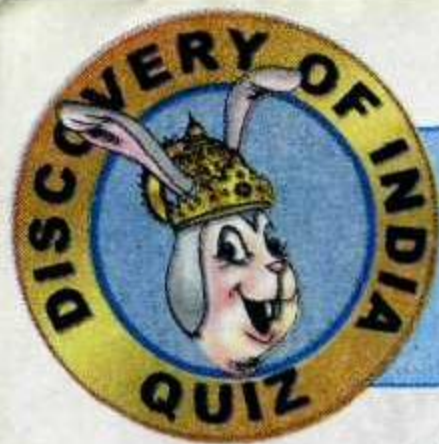
"Ah," said the tiger. "Then it was your mother who did it."

"My mother died a long time ago," wailed the kid, getting ready to run away.

"I don't care, I'm going to eat you up anyway," said the tiger and he chased the kid all the way down the river.

Let's presume he didn't catch him.





CHANDAMAMA

ENRICH YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Answers to the quiz published in this issue will appear in the next issue. Meanwhile, try to find the answers yourself and enrich your knowledge of India's antiquity and heritage.



1. (a) Who was the boy who studied with Krishna at the Gurukul of Sage Sandipani and who many years later paid a visit to Krishna at Dwaraka?
- (b) Who was the son of a demon-king, who was absolutely devoted to Lord Vishnu against his father's wish?
- (c) Who was the little prince who, when insulted by his step-mother because he wished to sit on his father's lap, went into the forest and realized God through severe penance?
- (d) Who was the prince who died of snake-bite and his mother had to carry his dead body all by herself at night to the cremation ground where she met her husband?
- (e) Who was the youngest Pandava hero in the Mahabharata War to be killed through a cruel Kaurava strategy?

November 14 is Children's Day. The Quiz this month is, therefore, devoted to young characters.

A boy, already acknowledged as a sage, was speaking to a group of seekers on several topics. In the course of his speech, he asserted that one cannot realize truth without conquering one's *Aanava* which, in Tamil, means ego and ignorance.

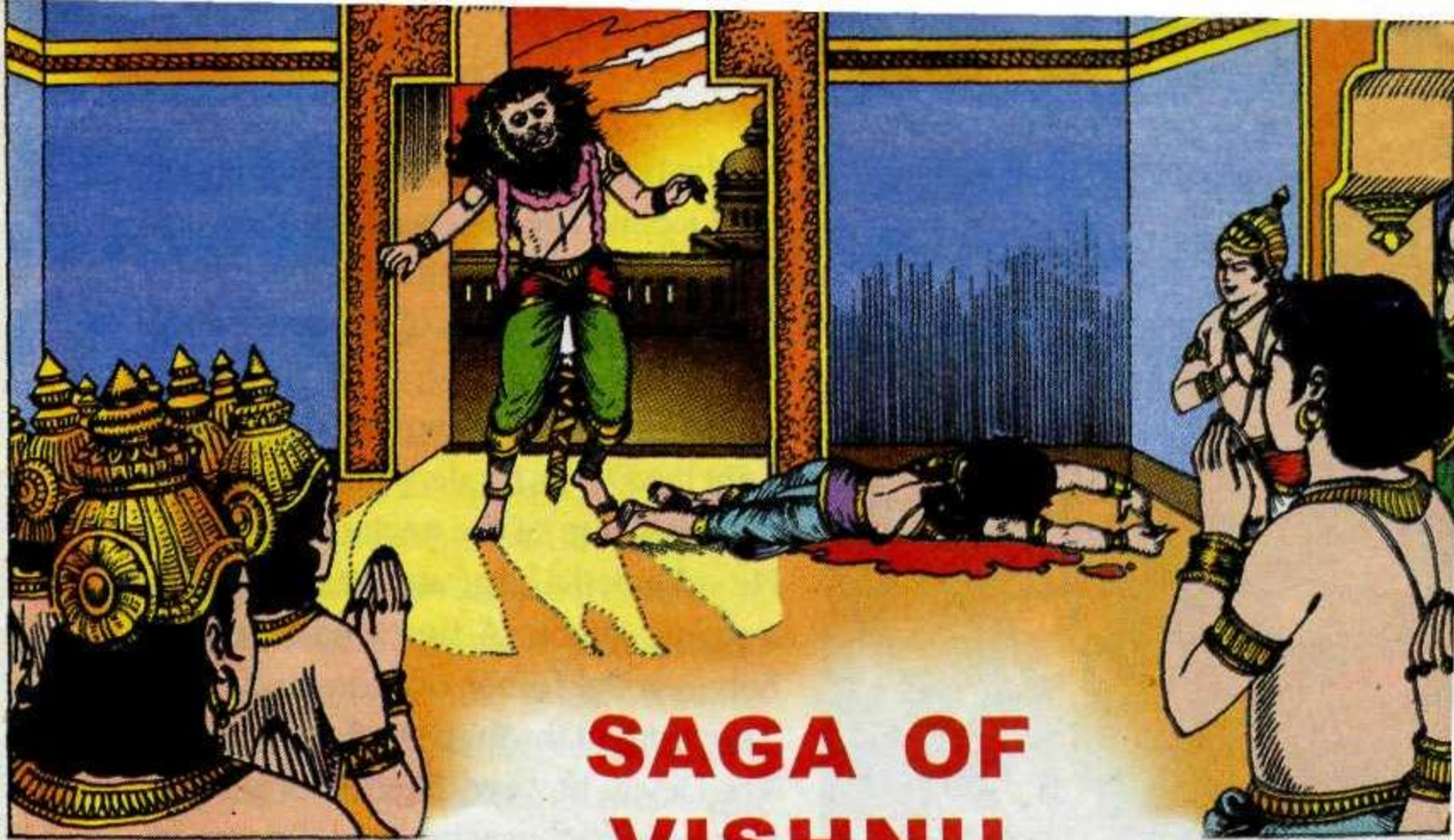
"Define *Aanava*!" an aged man who suddenly appeared there demanded in a haughty voice. The man was known as a scholar and a holy man. He did not like that people should flock to a mere boy for knowledge while he was present.

The young sage kept quiet. But the scholar repeated his question in a more stubborn manner. The young sage fixed his eyes on the scholar and, without uttering a word, pointed his finger straight at him.

The man's face paled. He was seen trembling. The next moment he bowed down to the young sage and accepted him as his teacher. The man had realized that he personified *Aanava* himself!

Who was the boy and who was the scholar?





SAGA OF VISHNU

6. WHEN 'SOMETHING' MEANT EVERYTHING

Hiranyakashipu embraced Prahlada and said: "Prahlada, because of you, I finally got a chance to fight with Vishnu." He then picked up his mace and, swirling it above his head, he made straight for Narasimha who had emerged from the iron pillar. With a bloodcurdling yell that shook the four corners of the Universe, Narasimha jumped high. Before Hiranyakashipu knew what was happening, Narasimha held him in a stranglehold from which he could not extricate himself.

Then Narasimha carried Hiranyakashipu to the door of the durbar hall. He stood on the threshold and so he was neither outside nor inside. It was

dusk ; so it was neither day nor night. He then placed him neither in the air nor on the earth, but on his thighs. Then using his nails, which were neither live nor dead, he tore open Hiranyakashipu's stomach. Thus, without going against Brahma's boon to Hiranyakashipu, Narasimha killed him.

Then, in a fury, he put on the entrail he had pulled out like a garland around his neck and laughed out loudly. The violent and ferocious laughter was terrible to hear as it echoed and reverberated through the Universe. The gods and demons alike trembled with fear. Even goddess Lakshmi was shaken. Then Prahlada's sweet voice





singing the praise of the Lord, pierced through the laughter and calmed the *avatar* down.

After he had calmed down, Narasimha blessed Prahlada, placed him on the throne, and asked him to rule the kingdom wisely and well.

Thus Jaya and Vijaya (as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu) completed one cycle of birth and death out of the three they had been cursed to undergo.

Prahlada ruled the Asuras wisely and well for some years. After that, he handed the throne to his son Virochan and went into the forest to meditate and pray to Lord Vishnu. After Virochan died, his son Bali came to the throne. Bali was a valorous and daring man. He captured the horse called Uchaishrava

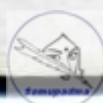
that had emerged during the churning of the Ocean. The Asura sculptor called Maya made it into a horse that could roam the three worlds of Heaven, Earth, and Hell.

As his power grew, Bali decided to fight the Devas for denying the Asuras of their share of the nectar or Amrita. He collected a large army and planned a strong attack. A fierce battle raged between the forces of Indra and Bali. They fought through the three worlds. The Devas, however, were stronger and immortal because they had consumed all the Amrita that came out of the great churning of the Ocean. The Asuras lost the battle and were completely routed.

However, Bali did not give up. He got Shukracharya, the guru of the Asuras, to use the Sanjeevani *mantra* to revive all the Asuras. He once again gathered and trained a large army of Asuras. He led this army against the Devas and after a mighty battle defeated them. He conquered the entire world and was now master of the Nether world as well as the Earth. He ruled over this empire with great efficiency and skill and came to be called Emperor Bali.

Bali now attacked Heaven. The Devas were so alarmed by the ferocious attack that they fled from Heaven and hid themselves in small corners of the Universe.

Bali was now the ruler of all the three worlds – Heaven, Earth, and Hell and



the entire Universe. He proved to be a just and compassionate king, and everyone was happy in his reign. However, there was one exception, and that was Aditi. Aditi was the mother of the Devas and she was very unhappy at the plight of her children. She was worried because her children were in exile and hiding in different corners of the Universe. She went to her husband the sage Kashyap and said : "It pains me to see our children forced out of their kingdom and wandering homeless all over the Universe. What can we do to help them?"

Kashyap asked her to pray to Vishnu, for, only He had the answer to this problem. So Aditi sat on a beautiful spot in the Himalayas and set her mind on Lord Vishnu. The Lord was pleased with her devotion and revealed himself to her. He said : "I will be born as a son to you and will restore Heaven to your children."

Soon a son was born to Aditi. He was called Vamana. He looked small but was very clever. Aditi

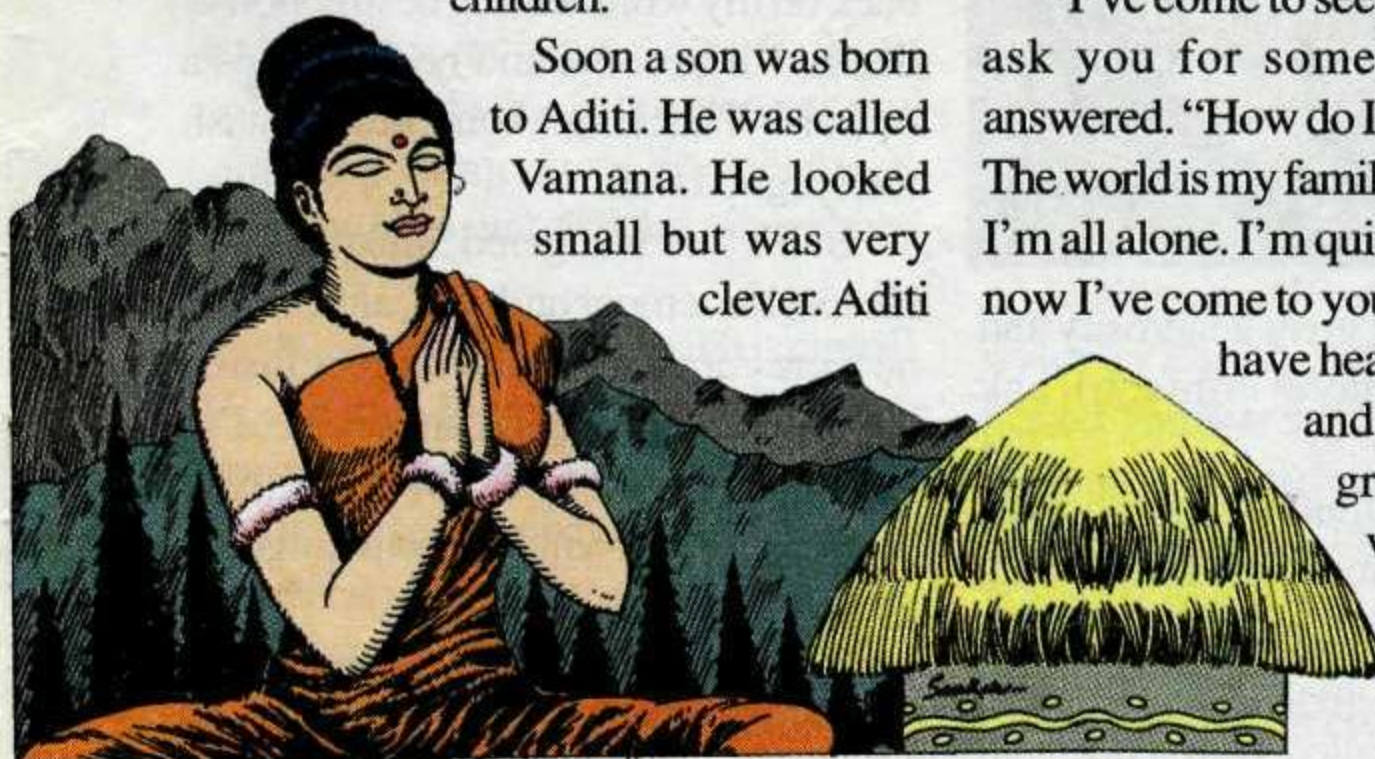
loved this youngest son of hers dearly.

Emperor Bali announced a huge sacrifice, on the banks of the river Narmada, to celebrate his being the ruler of the Universe. Shukracharya was the master of ceremonies. It was an elaborate affair and the emperor had promised to give anything anyone asked for during the sacrifice.

Vamana was still a student at that time. He set out to see the grand sacrifice, wearing his sacred thread over his shoulder and wrapping a deer skin around his hips. Emperor Bali was charmed by this fresh looking young man who came tripping along carrying an umbrella and a water pot. He asked Vamana, "O little one, who are you? And where are you going to looking so spruce and smart?"

"I've come to see your sacrifice and ask you for something," Vamana answered. "How do I introduce myself? The world is my family and yet right now I'm all alone. I'm quite wealthy, but just now I've come to you as a suppliant. I have heard that your father and grandfather were great heroes. Your valour and strength are known all over the world."

"Your words



sound rather strange," laughed Emperor Bali. "You talk of valour and courage. I hope you're not planning to fight me! For I'm sitting here to carry out the sacrifice and certainly cannot fight anyone."

"Well, how can you say that?" retorted Vamana. "How can I, a dwarf, compete with you, a reputed warrior?"



"I've heard of your great generosity and kindness and have come to ask something of you."

"Certainly. If that's why you have come, make your request," invited Bali.

Shukracharya, who had been listening to this conversation, became suspicious. He called Bali aside and

warned him. "Don't be carried away by this innocent looking dwarf. I think he is Vishnu in disguise and has come here to strip you of all your wealth and power," he cautioned him.

"If a great being like Vishnu asks something of me and I can give it to Him, then it is only my good fortune. It will also be a wonderful proof of my victory. Besides, I have already given my word and cannot go back on it now. It would be immoral."

"If you go back on your word to escape from death or avoid being destroyed, there is no shame. In fact, it is your duty, for, otherwise it would be suicide," Shukracharya counselled him.

"Maybe what you say is true; maybe He is Vishnu in disguise and has come to destroy me. Even if He destroys me in this way, it will be a moral victory for me and not a defeat! I won't be considered a weakling. But, if I go back on my word fearing destruction or death, I'll become and be known as a coward. That is not something I wish for," argued Bali.

Bali's words angered Shukracharya. He lost his temper and said, almost as if he were cursing him: "You're refusing to consider my well-meant advice. I'm warning you, the result of this will be very tragic. You will lose your kingdom and your life."

Bali answered with great humility, "Gurudev, I've accepted that all joys and

sorrows are part of life and one must accept them with equanimity. It is with this frame of mind that I'm present here to give everything I have in charity. Your ill-considered words have only paved the way for Vishnu to demand everything of me and carry out His deception on me. Everyone must reap the fruits of his actions and so must I for defying my Guru's advice. I accept your curse joyfully." Bali then bowed to Shukracharya. The sage went pale. He had no answer to Bali's words. He realised that he had played into Vishnu's hands and put his disciple in danger.

Emperor Bali then walked upto Vamana. Shukracharya tried to dissuade him once again. "O, Lord of the Asuras and Danavas, Vishnu in the form of a beggar can make you a beggar. He can crush all of the world and underworld. He can do anything. You have spent your whole lifetime creating wealth, prosperity, and happiness in the three worlds that belong to you. Your ambitions and your achievements will come to nothing if you go ahead now and allow Vamana to ask his 'something' of you."

"Neither power nor wealth is eternal. We can gain them just as easily as we lose them. Life is also impermanent. We'll have to die one day," Bali answered, unswerving in his intention to fulfil Vamana's wishes.

"This destruction will not be just

yours," persisted Shukracharya. "Your defeat will reflect on the entire race and will be a disgrace for us all."

"Yet, the fact that I've ruled justly and well and have also given alms to Vishnu would surely reflect well on our race and me," countered Bali as he reached the place where Vamana stood.



Vindhyavali, Bali's queen, brought water in a golden jug. Emperor Bali placed Vamana's small feet on a golden tray and washed them with the water in the jug. Then he addressed Vamana : "O great one in the guise of Vamana, ask me what you want. It is an honour that you wish to get something from me.



Would you like land or even my person? Whatever you want will be yours. Just ask it of me."

Vamana said with a small smile : "What will a *brahmachari* like me do with jewels or riches or cattle? I only need space to spread out my deerskin. A piece of land that I can measure with three steps of my small strides is all I need."

"Is that all?" asked Bali in surprise.

"Three strides of land may be small to you, but it is enough for my purpose. That is all I need," said Vamana.

"I grant you your wish," said Bali and tried to pour out water from the jug onto Vamana's hands to complete the act of charity.

Shukracharya still did not give up. He used his magical powers to hide in the spout of the jug and block it so that

the water would not pour out and the ritual act would be incomplete. However, Vamana inserted a blade of grass into the spout and cleared the passage. In the process the blade pierced Shukracharya's eye and blinded him. The water then fell into Vamana's cupped hands signifying the giving and accepting of the gift.

"Now all you have to do is, measure out the three strides with your feet and claim the land covered," said Bali to Vamana.

At once Vamana turned around where he stood and grew. He grew so big that he now covered all the three worlds. With one stride he covered the whole earth and the entire place below the sky; with the second stride he covered the whole sky, and the rest of the universe. Everyone watched this sight with awe. Lord Brahma in heaven washed Vishnu's feet with reverence. The drops of water that fell out became the Milky Way cutting a bright swathe in the sky.

Now Vamana in the form of the huge Thrivikrama asked Bali : "Where shall I place my foot for the third stride?"

Bali bent his head and said, "Here, please place your foot here."

Vamana now shrank to his original size and placing his foot on Bali's head said, "Bali, my foot that covered the earth or the sky in one step is unable to cover your head!"



Prahlada appeared then and spoke for his grandson. "Lord," he said, "my grandson is not your enemy. Please shower him with your compassion and grace."

Vindhyavali said : "O Lord Vamana, please ensure that no harm comes to my husband. That would be fair, for he deserves no less."

"Sister," said Vamana to Vindhyavali, "none can harm your husband. Such is the strength of his goodness and merit. That's why I had to come to him as a suppliant and beggar."

Then Vishnu blessed all those gathered by revealing himself in the full glory of his Vishvarupa and holding a long staff. "O Emperor Bali, your equal hasn't been born on Earth and never will be. You'll be known as the wisest and most just of kings. I'm sending you to Satal, one of the under worlds where you can rule forever. Your wife

and father will go with you. You will be peaceful and happy there. I'll be your doorkeeper in this form of Dandapani and protect you."

The people of the Earth were very sad over Mahabali's banishment, and wailed and mourned as he left. He promised to come back one day every year to ensure that they were well and happy. Some people believe that he returns to the Earth on Onam (a Kerala festival) day. Everybody cleans and decorates the houses that day to welcome Emperor Bali. People hold feasts and games in his honour, to show their happiness and joy at his visit. Some others believe that he comes for a visit on Deepavali day ; people light lamps and fire crackers in joy.

Be that as it may, people everywhere accept that Mahabali was one of the greatest rulers that ever was.

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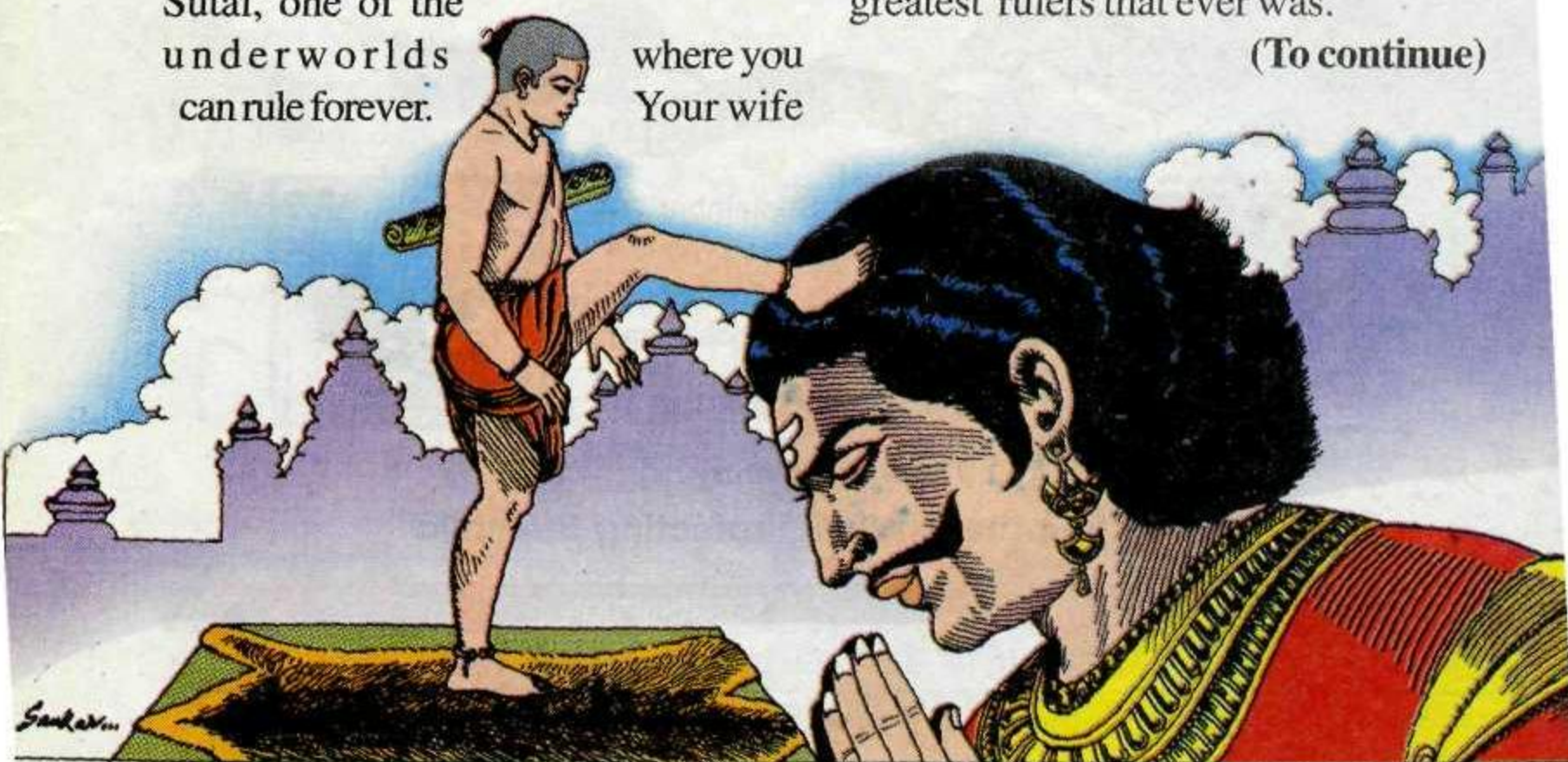




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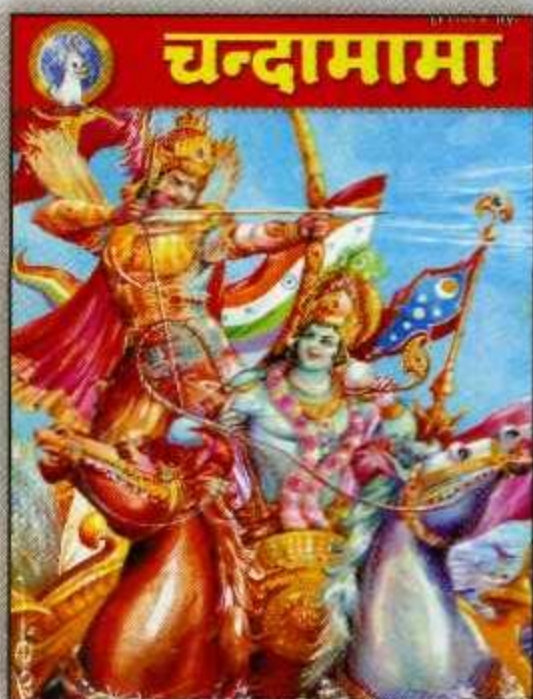
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